THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS

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THE BATTLE OF THE HORIZONS

BY

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Author of "The Hounds of Spring"

TORONTO

McCLELLAND AND STEWART

1928

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Dedicated

to

PETER *and* ROSEMARY

PART ONE

I

Looking at him, Athene Reid tilted her head back; her hands, petal-textured yet curiously suggestive of nervous strength, were clasped on her knee.

"I do long," she said, "to know England!"

Her great hazel eyes, set just perceptibly aslant under their fine, clearly marked brows, were fixed on him with a gaze that seemed childish in its emphasis of her feelings, and she went on, with inflections of rapture and intensity that were as free of affectation as was the expressiveness of her whole pose.

"It's always been — in my imagination, you know — a kind of ideal expression of everything that civilization should mean."

Geoffrey Graham had an impulse to take up her remark; to qualify and to explain, and though mitigating her vision of his country, yet somehow to leave intact what he conceived to be its essential rightness. Yet, even as his arguments ranged themselves, he could feel the impulse dimmed by his consciousness of her extraordinary and expressive loveliness. His desire to explain, and to discuss, in discussing England, all those problems and possibilities which had been, until this last week in Washington, his sole passionate preoccupation, was arrested by what was for him a magical concentration of beauty between the line of her square delicate jaw and her hair, which closed down like golden wings on either side of her face. So that all he came out with was "I wish that you would come over and see," spoken eagerly yet suavely, in the manner which impressed her as being, in contrast with the quick, springy courtesy of her countrymen, so redolently English.

"Maybe we shall, Mother and I anyway, this next

spring. We'd planned it this year, but somehow it did n't fit, and before that I was at college with more than enough to keep me busy in my vacations and Mother did n't want to go without me; and before that I 'd a season of nothing but gayety."

"And before that?" His gravity broke into a smile. Her readiness to tell him about herself struck him as singularly — according to one's usual standards — untainted by egoism: to derive, on the contrary, from a kind of simplicity and spontaneous friendliness, and by a perfect freedom from self-consciousness to give out an impression of dignity such as one usually associated with reserve.

She smiled too, more from her instinct to be companionable than from any clear notion, or even curiosity, regarding the cause of his amusement.

"Before that I was at school down in Southern Virginia, not so far from where my mother's family come from. She was born in Williamsburg. Father's family are more the Puritan New England style. The Reids were Scotch originally and settled in Boston in 1718. Father's childhood was spent in Boston, and later on he was at Harvard, and later on he met my mother when she was living with some aunts in New York and he was in business there."

"But he's retired now?" Geoffrey Graham glanced down the long room whose malachite pillars, forming an inner vista, were echoed by the brilliant dark green of the curtains; whose silver-mottled walls rose as a background for those specimens of Italian furniture, Chinese porcelain, French brocades and tapestries, bronzes and Venetian glass, which by their collective perfection assigned to the architecture its so essential air of being, with all its luxurious asceticism, the mere temple of purchased *patine* and imported beauty.

She followed his look.

"No; only we came from New York to settle here when I was ten years old, and Father goes to and from New York when he has to. Mother never cared about the life there, and she'd a lot of relatives here in Washington, besides its being not so far from her actual family. Her father only died two years back. Her mother's still alive and drives out every day around the countryside with a pair of chestnuts and a colored footman perched up alongside the colored coachman. And it's all she can do now — my mother's mother, I mean — to bring herself to speak of my father, on account of his being a Northerner. She's as bitter as can be about it still. Both her brothers and her uncle — that is, a kind of great-uncle of mine, Harley Peter his name was; we have his portrait in the library — were killed in the Civil War. Her husband lost a fortune too, because of the cotton trade being ruined."

"I'd no idea people still felt as violently as that."

"They surely do," she affirmed with her soft, vital emphasis. "Why, I had a classmate at school, a girl called Katy Howard, and when she got hold of the fact that I was, well, sort of half a Northerner, she would n't speak to me at all. I suppose," she went on, "that that's the way the Liberals and Conservatives used to be in England?"

"I don't think," he said gently, "that the parallel quite holds good." Her seriousness, combined with an odd and flickering mental naïveté, woke in him an emotion nearer pity than amusement, so that, had she been ten instead of twenty-one years old, he would have taken her on his knee and diverted her imagination into the paths of legend and romance. On the two previous occasions of their meeting, once at his cousins', the Langtons', — Henry Langton was an undersecretary at the British Embassy,—

and once at a ball given by Athene's aunt, Mrs. Page, it had occurred to him that, despite all her appetite for facts, and her college degree, and her present studies ranging from sociology to Oriental languages, she might actually be constituted more for imaginative and romantic than for intellectual satisfactions. Her hypothesis, flashing her picture of a life-and-death hatred between the valiant political phalanxes of Great Britain, was an illustration of just this quality in her, of this unconscious dominion of romantic over intellectual tendencies, and was seized upon by his observation. For he told himself that if her beauty had first struck to light in him this incessant and passionate wonder, this very emotion electrified his sensibilities to a kind of clairvoyance, so that her every word or action reverberated in his consciousness with peculiar subtleties of significance.

Her next remark was on the same line of inquiry.

"Anyway, now you have a third Socialist party, of course. I made a special study of Socialism in my third term at Braemar. It seems to me it wants to change the face of the whole world — from below."

Her expression had a vigorous sweetness; she leaned a little toward him now, so that he had the illusion that her neck was being weighed down by her jade necklace. She caught the change in his expression and asked in a new tone: —

"What were you thinking of, Mr. Graham?"

The simplicity of her question and the candid curiosity of her gaze woke him to his usual charming if reserved friendliness.

"For the moment I was admiring your necklace," he said.

She reflected that an American would unhesitatingly have assured her that he'd been thinking of her, and she recollected the dictum of Rosamund Page, that "all Eng-

lishmen thought they were God Almighty and a woman was made to bow when God Almighty sneezed — supposing that He graciously sneezed in her direction!"

II

Rosamund Page had always accused Athene of being an Anglomaniac; to which Athene had replied that she was n't anyway tainted by the crudities of hundred-per-cent Americanism; and Rosamund's final retort had been that if Athene were to spend, as she had, half a year among the English, she would see what a stiff-necked lot they were, with their freezing houses and their gloomy climate and their affected way of speaking.

That was quite definitely one of the qualities that Athene liked, — the way of speaking, — certainly as typified by Geoffrey Graham: a manner so gentle and unemphatic, yet perfectly definite; vehement opinions spoken in a leisured tone; humorous comments made without a smile, and deeper convictions expressed with an odd, elusive hint of humor.

He was n't, she told herself, "easy," "definite." She could, in fact, so little take his reactions for granted that his company gave her a sense of having to be, as never before, on the alert; of moving in an atmosphere of half lights and shades, and picking her way through a tangle of implications and reserves. The experience was both exhilarating and, despite her mental vitality, curiously exhausting. She was puzzled by this uncertainty; she had a vague, half-conscious notion of its threatening her self-assurance. In retrospect it charmed yet faintly irritated her, for she was accustomed to feeling her own personality as strong and flawless. She was troubled by a perception that it was, in some inexplicable way, this very crystalline quality in herself which put her almost

at a disadvantage; and she asked herself whether Geoffrey Graham's personality or his "Englishness" was the cause of her spasmodic and only half-acknowledged discomfitures. Anyway she was inclined, because the young man and his nationality seemed so inextricable, and perhaps also because of his fine, somewhat Spanish looks, — Anglo-Saxon was nowhere in the physiognomy, — to forgive him, and to be puzzled afresh by her awareness that she liked him so much.

While she marshaled these reflections, she gave him a conversational account of her necklace: that her father had been on a trip to China and Japan three years back, had brought home the necklace, and given it her.

"It gives me a little thrill of pleasure every time I put it on," she said.

"The color 's wonderful." He was looking at her hair, and she, observing this, wondered whether perhaps, after all, he was not so "different." Her smile had a sudden brilliance.

"You care for color?"

He dragged his gaze from the burnished curves about her face.

"Yes," he said easily. "Tremendously."

"You don't practise any art yourself?"

"I hardly have time. Occasionally I do a few water colors, out-of-door stuff, but my work scarcely leaves me opportunities."

"But you write?"

"Works and articles on economic subjects are scarcely — art." He paused to light a cigarette. "My sister sculpts, though."

"Does what, Mr. Graham?"

"Is a sculptress. She 's rather good, for her age."

"Why, I 'd no idea. How wonderfully interesting! What 's her name?"

"Patricia."

"Why — you don't mean — " Athene was enraptured. "Patricia Graham? Why, I saw a whole page about her, a lot of type and four or five photographs of heads and figures she's been exhibiting in London; it was in *Vogue* or some such paper." There radiated from Athene a whole-hearted delight, so that Geoffrey smiled, as a child will smile with pleasure at a kindled fire.

"And there was a picture of her," she continued. "I remember now, in a kind of 'brocade-y' dress. She must be wonderful!" she exclaimed. "A face like — like a very sensitive, tragical boy."

He was startled by the aptitude of her description.

"Yes. Patricia is like that, rather. Not," he amplified, "that she is actually tragical. She's often immense fun."

Athene nodded. "But then, that's the artistic temperament, isn't it? Just bursting with fun one time, and with an awful fit of the blues another. Most artists are that way. How old is she?"

"Patricia? She's twenty-seven, two years older than I am."

"And is she terribly wrapped up in her work? Doesn't care for dancing, and all that kind of thing?"

"Clothes and young men, you mean?"

"Well — yes. I mean the kind of ways the ordinary girl gets color into her life."

He realized by the implication of her tone that she didn't include herself in the latter category, and wondered with a swift incidental curiosity just how far she were classifiable.

"Oh, I think Patricia likes a certain amount of social life," he said.

"She's dark, isn't she? She looks so in her photo; as a matter of fact, it *was* quite a bit like you."

"Our coloring's much the same. We have a Spanish grandmother to account for it."

"Your mother's mother?"

"Yes."

"And is your mother as wonderful-looking as your sister?"

"She isn't as dark — different, rather. But she — well, it isn't her looks particularly, but she *is* wonderful, I think."

"Just how d'you mean?" Athene was eager; she wanted him to tell her more ; to tell her about his family, his English home. His tribute to his mother touched a chord in her nature which was as much genuine sentiment as sentimentality.

"She's so amazingly good," he said, "in an endless, complicated sort of way. Not just 'virtue in homespun,' — she has a quick temper at times, — or asceticism, or just excellence, but a sort of delicious, enormous, humorous 'understandingness'."

Athene spoke softly: "She must be — great."

His assent was grave: "She is."

He looked afresh at the girl opposite him, trying to envisage her side by side with his mother. The vision had a piquancy, a charm. "Mother would understand her better than I do," he thought.

"And your father?" Athene asked. She so wanted to make up the group, to compose her picture of his home.

"My father?"

She wondered why his expression should relax to a smile.

"Father's a Member of Parliament and a J. P."

"What's that?"

"A justice of the peace; and he hunts, speaks three languages badly, reads his classics over and over again, and fumes over the newspapers every morning."

"He must be rather a dear."

"Oh, he is; everybody likes him. He worships my mother, treats her as something between an adorable child and an angel from another world, and, whenever there's a crisis, relies on her completely. When my two elder brothers were killed within a week of each other, in 1917, it was Father who went to pieces completely, and my mother who managed to keep us all going."

"I'd no idea—"

"Yes," he affirmed, without any peculiar intonation, "there were six of us altogether: Philip and Antony, the two eldest, then Patricia and I, and then the twins, Clifford and Bobs. Bobs's real name is Marjorie Alice, but she's always been called Bobs."

Athene was entranced. "You do all sound just too attractive! Fancy twins! Are they grown up?"

Geoffrey smiled. "They think so. And we all have to pretend we think so. They're nearly twenty and both at Oxford, where, I gather, Clifford contrives to be a buck by wearing a different jumper every day of the week, and Bobs is rapidly becoming a very earnest Communist."

"Why—they do sound fun! And is she very good-looking, the way your other sister is?"

Geoffrey envisaged the twins as he had last seen them, waving good-byes from Southampton dock, a fair, beaming couple, with even a vague resemblance in their dress—brownish tweeds and felt hats and monstrous leather motoring gloves, Bobs holding Achilles, the sheep dog, in leash.

He hesitated. "She's quite different. Much more like my father. Blue-eyed, and—well, yes, very pretty, and simple in a way, very straightforward, and mad about animals, and inclined to be intolerant about human beings."

Suddenly Geoffrey observed the clock on a table by the sofa.

"I'd no idea—" he apologized. "I've grossly taken up your time."

For a second her great hazel eyes seemed to grow larger.

"I've been so perfectly fascinated by all you tell me," she said. The color unexpectedly dawned and died beneath her pale clear skin. "I could listen for ages to all you describe. Perhaps," she went on with her normal assured and gracious vivacity, "you'll come and lunch with us some day next week. I'd like to have you meet my parents."

"I should be charmed, Miss Reid."

And the Chinese servant showed him out on to the pavement of the frosty sunlit Massachusetts Avenue, where, as his cousins the Langtons had informed him, the Washington *haut monde* dwelt, in what seemed an infinite vista of pale dazzling mansions.

III

"Would you care," Athene said on the telephone, "to come to lunch here to-morrow and come on with me to a meeting of the Egerian Club?" Which was, ostensibly, why Geoffrey Graham reappeared a week later in the room with the malachite pillars.

She introduced him, even while the renewed sight of her set up an unaccountable vibration through his prepared and adjusted judgment, to her mother.

"Mamma, this is Mr. Graham."

The older woman's smile was gracious, but without depth; her fine eyes and fine features, framed by waved white hair and set off by small pearl and diamond earrings, seemed, as did her whole person, an elegant and

good-looking mummification of youthful elegance and good looks. Her complexion was faintly powdered and more faintly rouged; her dress was the Paris gown of a smart American, her rings remarkable, her feet and ankles exquisitely slender.

"Very delighted to meet you, Mr. Graham." She spoke with a drawl. "Athene's been telling me all about you."

He wondered how Athene had edited such scraps of information as he'd given her.

Mr. Reid was what Geoffrey vaguely expected; quick-glancing, well set up, spruce in movement, gray hair, gray eyes, gray suit, an orchid in his buttonhole — his cherished "Chamberlain eccentricity," for he cultivated municipal ideals and an orchid house. A look of wakeful, even intelligence, of physical stamina, and spiritual complacency. Geoffrey saw him as the Harvard graduate grown old, but not grown up. He thought, taking the rapid handshake and the concise "Glad to meet you, Mr. Graham," "The American business man doesn't grow up — he grows rich;" and then, as he glanced again at Mrs. Reid and her daughter, there forced itself upon him, in corollary, the query, "And the women? These business men's women? Do they grow up? Or do they only grow — beautiful?"

Rich men, beautiful women, an intensification of riches and of beauty such as one scarcely found in the same quantity and degree in Europe; a world that one curiously slipped into, of rarity, refinement, culture, luxury; an epitome of so many qualities one associated with civilization. Somehow a luminous artificiality about it; and yet, in these people, an insistent and unconscious simplicity.

Something of child's play in all this exquisite elaboration: the marble hall with the fountain in the centre; the

orange trees; the marble stairway on which Cinderella might have left her slipper; the tapestried dining room; the Chinese footmen; the conspiracy of gold plate and rare glass, of exquisite dishes and a profusion of flowers and fruits, to give one a sense of banqueting.

Mr. Reid spoke of the stabilization of the mark; had Mr. Graham been in Germany since the War?

Mrs. Reid, nibbling at a salted walnut, expressed one or two violently anti-German sentiments.

". . . And I just *will* not hear Wagner any more," she concluded.

(These people, whom one apprehended as being the epitome, the finest essence, of their civilization. A Western, vital, ascendant civilization. The New World.)

Mrs. Reid was relating: "And when Grace Jackson said to me that her son was studying the philosophy of Kant, I simply said to her, 'Grace! It just isn't any use speaking to me of Kant or Mozart or von Tirpitz or any of those men. I never can forget the brutal atrocities committed by the Germans in Belgium or the way the Kaiser behaved.'"

Athene tilted her chin.

"But, Mamma, all war is brutal, and great artists are surely above temporary national battles."

She was solemn — emotional almost.

Mr. Reid once more cast a verbal lasso over Geoffrey's attention. "Now my idea is, Mr. Graham . . . this currency inflation . . . The question of stabilization, as I view the matter, has two aspects . . . The gold standard . . ."

Geoffrey gave out a polite interest. Opposite him Athene, in her high-backed brocade chair. "The gold standard" drummed an inconsequent mental refrain. The gold standard . . . Athene's small golden head . . .

Mr. Reid's nasal even tones: "The gold standard, from

an industrialist's and financier's standpoint, is primitive, Mr. Graham. The ordinary public do not grasp the fact. . . . Purchasing power . . . "

"Yes," said Geoffrey. "Yes, the gold standard (exquisite, those tapestries!) is primitive. . . ."

Mrs. Reid was peeling a peach.

"Well, I mean to take Athene with me to Europe while the exchange is good. Sophie Page got Rosamund a whole heap of perfectly lovely gowns and hats in Paris for about half what we have to pay in New York."

"I do hope, Mrs. Reid, that when you and Athene come over you 'll come and visit us in England."

The proposal had, quite patently, a deeper significance for Mrs. Reid than its tone seemed to justify. Her essentially bland countenance was turned on the young man with an expression that had in it a hint of inquiry; of "Now, just exactly what are you getting at?" And from this moment she appeared not merely passively but most electrically aware of Geoffrey's presence, giving him so active an attention that her husband perforce became silent, and sat, in a chair that might have enthroned Cesare Borgia, puffing at his cigar and staring before him with absent vivacity.

"A writer on economics!" she exclaimed. She was amiable, but the information obviously made him no more amenable to her powers of classification. Her smile, though perfunctory, was n't hostile.

"Yes — yes. You lecture too? At London University? You seem very young to be doing that."

"I 'm twenty-five. I was at Cambridge from the spring of 1919 until 1923. Then I traveled for a year — rather with the idea of doing some research work. I spent six months in Germany, and the rest of the time all over the place from Budapest to Constantinople and Madrid. Then I settled down to this job in London. My people, or

rather my father, hoped I'd go to the bar and then follow him into politics."

"But you care for this work," Athene softly intervened. "You find it — satisfies you? And you like it?"

He gave her one of his grave, vivid looks. "Enormously," he said.

Mr. Reid still puffed at his cigar.

"And your father," Mr. Reid demanded, "is Sir Charles Graham?"

Geoffrey assented.

"A baronet?"

Geoffrey's assent was solemn.

Mr. Reid woke to conversational life.

"Your peerage is about as complex a proposition as I ever puzzled my brains over. I remember there was a Mr. Somebody at the Embassy here, and he was married to a woman who was Lady Helen Somebody, and I was always forgetting when we met them that he was n't Lord Somebody."

His gray eye was fixed on Geoffrey with reflective surprise.

"Then your mother is Lady Graham?" Mrs. Reid inquired. "*Not* Lady Something Graham?"

"Exactly."

He glanced at Athene and had the impression that she was puzzled by something in his expression — manner. That she was puzzled, and intensely interested.

"And how long have you been in America?" Mr. Reid demanded.

"Two months. I came over in September and mean to sail just before Christmas. My idea was to see something of the industrial life over here, as far as one can, as an outsider. I started in Chicago, came east to Detroit and Pittsburgh. Then I came down this coast, as it were, starting in Massachusetts and making my tour of facto-

ries through New York and New Jersey. After this I go South for three weeks, and eventually sail from New York. That," he concluded, "is my brief and inadequate American Odyssey."

Mr. Reid nodded. "You certainly have been busy. And is it your idea to write a book on your journey?"

"Not at present, though I may use some of the facts comparatively in a monograph I'm doing; I've got fairly detailed and extensive notes of what I have been able to see. I shall use these too for my lectures and possibly for some newspaper articles. But I shouldn't feel competent or justified in producing a 'work' on such a slight basis: inevitably slight when one's whole view has been rapid and cursory. I think too many people come to this continent and, when they've had a minimum of experience and one or two impressions, go steaming back in a high state of complacency to write a book. Every dinner party in London nowadays is afflicted with at least one authority on America, who's usually been here six weeks, and seen New York and Boston and possibly Niagara Falls, and has as much actual knowledge of the subject as a fly would have of the Sphinx if it settled for a moment on one of the claws. You're so—" he hesitated—"so tremendous. One's whole focus has to change. The mere distances, population, scale of production; the combination of speed and space and quantity; all the enormous reserves of riches and energy that one feels about one, like a storage of power; the whole scale's so Gargantuan, and the quality so dynamic. In some ways it's terrifying—and fascinating!"

He was suddenly glowing, expressive, oblivious, in his preoccupation, of his audience, flashing a deep, abstract enthusiasm.

Mr. Reid had the air of one receiving a personal compliment.

"And our — character, Mr. Graham?"

Geoffrey was arrested by Athene's query. He met her glance and found in it some dubious yet insistent quality.

"What do you feel about us as a people?" she went on.

He had, unexpectedly, a realization of an instinctive agility in her.

"So far," he replied, with his faintly smiling gentleness, "I've only had the privilege of meeting entirely delightful ones." But as they adjourned to the library he was aware that Athene had n't been satisfied with his reply.

IV

Natasha Wells was to give a recital at the Egerian Club — Natasha Wells, the "Harp Poetess from Oklahoma." And the Egerias were each entitled to bring a friend.

The club room was hung with pictures of intellectual women, Sappho, George Sand, George Eliot — artistic women. The decoration pure, a little mystical: blue curtains, white walls, and candlelight, seven candles to each sconce. A crowd of intellectual and artistic women drank tea and smoked and talked, so that the air was thick and shrill with incessant exclamations.

A diverse crowd, so Geoffrey observed, entering with Athene. Women from seventeen to seventy, some elegant, perfumed, waved, immaculate; some in thick tweeds, flat shoes, owlish spectacles; others Greenwich Village "arty" — flopping black hats and orange neck-scarves and vermilion lips.

Mrs. Seidel Cherrie — "The president," Athene whispered — ascended a platform at the end of the room, smart and bulky in sables and navy-blue satin. Immediately the crowd began to range itself on chairs and sofas;

those whose temperament so inclined them sat upon the floor.

Mrs. Cherrie stared through her pince-nez at her fellow Egerias and their friends.

"I have the very great privilege of introducing Miss Natasha Wells to you all . . ."

There was applause, then eager silence as Mrs. Cherrie turned and descended among the audience. A door opened at the back of the platform, and there stepped forward a figure in saffron-colored robes, an ample figure, a physiognomy at once sharp and vague, faded and animated, surmounted by a diadem of gold leaves. Miss Wells! A large harp was wheeled in after her, a stool placed beside it. Her pale eyes seemed to grow yet more prominent as she surveyed, yet seemed not at all to focus, her audience. She spoke in a flat, loud voice, pitched unnaturally high.

"First of all, I will recite my poem, 'Impassionata.'"

Athene glanced at Geoffrey; observed a momentary curve at the corners of his mouth. He turned to meet her deep, inquiring look; his smile broke out, an irrepressible flash.

"Wonderful," he murmured.

Slowly Athene smiled in response; she glanced at Miss Wells, saffron yet virginal, seating herself beside her towering harp.

"I suppose she is," Athene whispered. Alone, she would have accepted Miss Wells as an artistic interest; and becoming aware of this, she was grave again, absorbed by the elusive quality of his seriousness. This unexpected laughing — unexpected and unnerving, and lovable. She drew herself up to slender rigidity. Lovable? Love? Her poise was of detachment; to Geoffrey's momentary glance she had a flowerlike coolness. Her vision held a blurred form on the platform above serried hats and shoulders. Lovable? She knew that he was

still faintly smiling. Love — romance — England. . . . She wondered at her own sudden emotion. There were tears in her eyes.

An English home, stately and peaceful, trees and skies by Constable. And London to call one's own, the London of kings and queens, romantic, whispering of the past, of history. An English world. A house built before Raleigh laid down his cloak for Elizabeth, latticed windows, four-poster beds. Gardens planned three hundred years ago, and lawns grown velvety through innumerable generations.

She told herself that she was in love with Geoffrey Graham. She saw him, with a kind of reverence, silhouetted against the horizons of his country, horizons hazily and wonderfully illumined by her imagination.

Miss Natasha Wells plucked at her harp. "Impassionata!" she exclaimed; and paused; and plucked again at the harp. Her eyelids moved up and down like the eyelids of a frog; her long sleeves swayed.

"The bitter flames of unrequited love
Consume my soul.
I spend my long, sad days
In trying not to think,
And so, my love, I sink and sink."

(The chords assumed a flavor of Tosti's "Farewell.")

"Deep into the abyss!"

The poem continued for ten minutes.

The final note died to utter silence. The countenance of the poetess appeared to blench and twitch. An outbreak of clapping and applause.

"Miss Wells," Geoffrey observed, "seems to have had an unhappy love life."

"Poor thing," Athene said.

He was startled by her radiant dreaminess, the glow and sweetness of her look. It was as though her ordinary

assurance had been transmuted to a kind of exaltation.

"Poor thing," she repeated, dismissing what she vaguely knew she had n't taken in.

Miss Wells's loud, flat tones rang out:—

"Mezzanine!"

She plucked a lurid, gurgling music.

"I hang 'twixt Heaven and Hell.
I hang upon the Gallows of Life—"

The voice, the chords, jerked and burbled on.

Geoffrey leaned back; Athene's face was turned away from him; he watched the curve of her cheek, the flicker of her lashes, the sweep of hair against the nape of her neck. Her hat cast violet shadows on her skin. Her stillness seemed to give a spiritual significance to her beauty. When she was animated, she was charming, pleasing; at the pitch of her animation, adorable; but her quiet had this quality which made him afraid, as though he had trespassed on a dream not his own.

Natasha Wells's voice:—

"I am a plaything, a toy,
A toy in the hands of Time—"

Would she marry him? He found himself facing it now. His arms were crossed and he could feel his heart jerking under his right hand. He wanted to marry her.

Now Mrs. Cherrie was again on the platform, comparing her protégée to Sappho:—

"The Isles of Greece, the Isles of Greece,
Where burning Sappho loved and sung—"

Athene turned suddenly.

"Let 's go," she said. And as they emerged she lifted her face to the starlit sky.

"I have to apologize for the show, Mr. Graham."

He was perfunctory:—

"On the contrary, I was entertained."

V

"I SHALL walk home," she announced. "The car is n't due for half an hour."

"May I accompany you?"

She nodded, taking his company for granted. Their steps sounded on the frosty pavement.

She was silent. Then, "What does your home look like?" she demanded.

Look like? What did Yoxalls look like?

"Like the White House — a small edition of it."

"The White House? Oh!" And she turned to him with a comical expression of amazement and reproach. "Gracious!"

"And you expected — ?"

But she was disconcerted.

"A baronial hall?" he suggested.

She shook her head with a hint of temper.

"No," she said shortly.

"Not a mediæval castle, with moats and ghosts and drawbridges?"

Now a tilt of her head, a setting back of her shoulders. "Not at all."

He could n't help laughing, but she missed his look.

"Athene!" Her name slipped out unconsciously.

"I don't see what exactly you find so comic." She told herself that she hated his — ribaldry.

"Rafters?" he queried. "And oak beams and — and — latticed windows?"

She shook her head.

"No." She found herself furiously, miserably at a loss. What was he getting at? Was he being insolent? And yet his manner was polite, perfect. Did he mean that he thought her silly? Ignorant? Or, in his queer way, did he mean something quite different — or noth-

ing at all? She quickened her step, and suddenly, as they passed through the brilliance of a street lamp, he saw that she was crying.

"Athene — Athene, darling!"

She shook her head, pressing her lips together.

"Athene, my dear, I didn't mean to hurt you."

His voice startled her — the swift inflections of pain. Forgetting her dignity, she stopped to look at him.

"I thought you were making fun of me," she said.

He hesitated, staring at her with a curious, hurting intensity.

"Funny, lovely child!" He hesitated again. "I've merely been trying not to tell you — that I love you."

"Oh —" A queer, broken cry.

"Because I knew that — there would be so little use in my — bothering you about it."

She had a sense of recovering her serenity.

"I didn't understand," she temporized, and felt, as their mutual setting, the frozen beauty of the evening.

"You know I love you."

She shook her head.

"I didn't — I didn't imagine —"

"From the first moment."

"No," she said quickly. "You were attracted, perhaps — interested."

"In a way I was afraid. But all the same I loved you. I didn't realize how much."

She had with him now a feeling of power, and used it compassionately.

"But you criticized me to yourself — often."

He bent his head. "I adore you."

She held out her hand.

"I should care very much to marry you," she said.

And the restraint of her words seemed to him beautiful.

VI

GEOFFREY awoke the next morning with a startled sense of having to realize — what? He fumbled through veils of realization: his hotel bedroom — the dressing table — the shaft of sunlight piercing between the curtains, running toward him across the pink carpet — books and papers piled on the writing table — the telephone on the table beside his bed. He shifted on his pillow and — Last night — yesterday evening — Athene!

The telephone rang furiously at his ear. He snatched the receiver.

"Quarter of eight."

"Thank you."

He 'd asked to be called. Athene was to come for him at nine, to take him for a drive while they discussed — Her last words last night — Her face tilted up to him, beautiful and unreal, in the frozen starlight.

"It all seems so queer — Geoffrey"; she 'd spoken his name with a kind of wonder. "I want to be alone, and think it out to myself." She 'd stepped back, and her light footfall had echoed up and down the dark avenue. "To-morrow," she 'd said. "We can tell my parents then, after we 've met —" And she 'd turned, and gone into the large, elegant house.

He took up the receiver.

"When does the next mail leave for England?"

"Hold on." Then the quick clanging tones again: "Anything to leave New York to-morrow should be mailed before midday to-day. The boats are Aquitania . . ." The voice rattled off the list of names.

"Thank you."

He lay still.

It had happened so strangely, suddenly. Athene crying: crying because — But he did n't understand her odd

moods and simplicities. She'd thought he was making fun of her. Queer childish arrogance; and then, at the last, her elusive, marveling sweetness. Elusive! He didn't know her. And now he was going to marry her. He had an aching sense of adventure — like waking as a child, and finding a sunny morning outside the window, and breathing the fragrant shimmering promise of the day.

She'd seemed, at first, simple. Lovely, and friendly, and funnily conceited, enchanting him by these qualities, so that he had thought how gently and noncommittally he was contented to be a little in love with her and interested in her. And then, somehow, her beauty, blended with his uncertain comprehensions of what she might, after all, be like, — complex? remote? — had taken possession of him; changed his content to restlessness, his interest to reverence, his appreciation to a passionate wonder. He shut his eyes; beheld her again: her assured poise, and her look, as though she couldn't quite "take him in." He'd kissed her hand, and she'd taken it without response or comment, as her due.

He sprang up. A longing for light and movement. He jerked back the curtains; the sunlight poured in, and into the shining white bathroom. America had a genius for bathrooms. The water rose with miraculous speed, hot liquid crystal, bluish on the white marble. A genius for bathrooms. He sang: —

"Chicago, Chicago, that toddling town!"

They'd played that at the Pages' ball that evening. . . . Dancing with Athene — Athene, in silver.

"Chicago, Chicago, I'll take you around."

Strange, not to have known when he first met her. Betty Langton had told him of her before that dinner

party. "Supposed to be clever. Well dressed, as they all are; they can afford it!" The Langtons had three children and their career was to entertain, to seem lavish and with this lavishness genial and at ease, on little more than the diplomatic salary; and Betty Langton, who contrived every old dress to seem new twice a year, was bitter. "They *are* money, these Americans," she'd said. "Their looks and their outlooks and everything about them are so tied up with being in a state of fantastic financial security that you can't tell where they end and dollars begin. Sit one of them down to the good old English game of overdrafts and economies and they'd be utterly at a loss."

The notion of Athene implied in such a statement — as being, even in circumstances so unlikely for her, at a loss — struck Geoffrey as somehow disconcerting. Athene and economy; Athene and difficulties — restrictions; Athene and — in fact he momentarily faced it — and those realities which all her views on the real and essential didn't in the least enable her to apprehend: realities beautifully absent from the life she knew, and abundant in an England which the War had left so differently conditioned from the mellow and romantic land she anticipated. Shelving his doubts as to how she'd take it and take to it, reassuring himself partly by his discernment of quite magnificently competent and practical qualities in her, he came back to a certain prosaic thankfulness that she had, after all, a considerable allowance of her own, and that in whatever way her sensibilities might react to the difficulties of disillusion, of mental feverishness, of financial troubles, in those around her, her own income would continue to give her not merely those luxuries of which she wasn't even conscious, but supremely that spiritual sureness, that peculiar clearness of soul, attainable as often by the possession of wealth as — in a more recognized tradition — by its renunciation.

Sitting down at the writing table, he began, on a paper richly headed "THE COLUMBUS HOTEL, WASHINGTON:" —

MOTHER DARLING, —

You asked me in your last letter whether I had woken no Sleeping Beauty on my travels; to which I will reply that the young ladies of this land are so perpetually wide awake that I think either they never sleep or else they are all sleepwalkers and manage it — the sleeping, I mean — as it were en route toward whatever destination their perfectly astounding vitality leads them.

Which is all nonsense, darling, so that you will have guessed from the first that I 've got something serious to say.

I wish I could say it as beautifully as it is!

VII

SIX weeks later.

"Well, Mrs. Graham!"

Rosamund Page sat on a trunk and smoked while Mrs. Reid's maid divested Athene of her bridal raiment.

Rosamund crossed her knees and, leaning back with an almost energetic languor, surveyed her cousin.

"So the fatal knot is tied and your reservations taken on the Matrimonial Express. And I must say I think you 're brave. I would n't give up my good times yet. Lanvin certainly has made you a lovely thing in that gown — you looked a dream; everybody was wild about you. By the way, did you hear the latest thing in divorce gowns? Sophie Bennett was telling me — something awfully kind of frisky and giddy and smart. She said it 's worth getting through the marriage just to wear one of those gowns. You surely must stick to the white and silver bride-y touch in all your evening frocks, Athene — suits you down to the ground! Mr. Geoffrey Graham is

a darned lucky boy, and I hope he knows it. Oh, Josephine," Rosamund apostrophized the maid, "will you be every kind of an angel and get hold of a Scotch for me? I'm all sort of funny after your show, Athene, and there was n't anything downstairs except champagne, which I absolutely detest.

"I must say, I think you're simply marvelous, Athene, to have gotten a trousseau together and carried through the whole thing in six weeks. I reckon it 's the prospect of a title your mother likes, or she would n't have made your Poppa come round so quick."

Athene protested: —

"Oh, Father likes Geoffrey for himself."

"May the Lord bless you, Josephine!" Rosamund took the glass of neat whiskey off the tray. "You 'd better have some too, Athene, to keep you going."

Athene shook her head.

"You know I don't like it."

Rosamund threw back her smart pretty head as she gulped down the liquid.

"That shows you're fit to be the wife of an Englishman. The girls over there don't touch it. So you get to New York to-night and sail to-morrow? I don't envy you the Atlantic Ocean for a wedding trip. I always feel as if I were just going to pass out the whole time. My, I like your suit — that 's the one you told me of, is it? You 'll find that useful abroad; they all live in tailor-mades; I suppose it 's because their houses are so cold."

Rosamund threw away the end of her cigarette and, jumping up, began to pace about the room.

Athene was only half conscious of her presence, or of Josephine's ministrations. She was obsessed by a sense of being, at last, on the edge of adventure: an adventure, moreover, which presented itself as an escape from what she conceived as limitations; from an existence that

had n't, somehow, with all its fulfillment of her immediate demands, ever satisfied a certain romantic hunger of the spirit. She thought: "This is the last time I shall look in this glass," and saw her own face as a symbol of emancipation, and her room, with its rose-colored hangings and Louis Quinze bed, as a fading background.

"When 'll you arrive?" Rosamund was asking. Athene heard herself reply: —

"Just in time for Christmas. We 're going to Geoffrey's family down in the country, near Melbury," she said, and "Melbury" rang in her head, so that she smiled as if at a cherished secret.

Mrs. Reid came hurrying into the room.

"Why, Athene, child! Are n't you ready yet? Josephine, shut that bag at once. Now where 's your fur coat? My Lord, child, you 'll never catch that train!"

Suddenly Mrs. Reid, flushed and elegant, sat down on the bed and began to sob.

"Why, Aunt May!" Rosamund exclaimed.

Mrs. Reid pressed a handkerchief to her impeccable features.

"Why, Mother dear!" Athene was startled from her glowing dream.

"It 's only natural," sobbed Mrs. Reid.

Athene was on her knees beside her.

"Dear, *dear* Mother!"

"It 's only natural," Mrs. Reid repeated. "A mother's feelings. . . . And you *would* be so hurried about it, Athene — and you have n't got half the trousseau you ought to have." She sobbed afresh. "And everybody asking where the bridegroom's family are! And naturally they think it must be a queer kind of a family that can't afford a trip over here for the wedding."

Athene took her mother's hand, perceiving the mainspring of this chagrin.

"But, Mother dear, you heard what Geoffrey was explaining. It's different there now. His people can only just afford to keep up their responsibilities, he says. His mother wanted to come — and then she didn't think she was justified — "

"Titled people," choked Mrs. Reid. "Seems to me they should be able to afford to live decently. People in Europe seem to make the War an excuse for everything."

Athene hesitated. "Perhaps it is," she said.

"All the same," remarked Mrs. Reid, with a tearful and faintly bitter persistence, "it is n't any use my telling our friends that Sir Charles and Lady Graham can't come because there was a war six years ago."

"But, Mother dear — surely such things don't matter?" And then Athene found herself appealing: "Mother — surely, if I 'm so happy? It all seems so beautiful to me," she went on, and there was an exaltation, a shade of mysticism in her expression. "So beautiful," she repeated, "like the fulfillment of all my dreams!"

"Well," Rosamund commented, glancing at her watch and perceptibly relieved at the cessation of Mrs. Reid's tears, "you 'd better worry less about your dreams and more about your husband; he must be eating his hat with impatience."

"Anyway," said Mrs. Reid, rising superbly to her feet, "anyway, I told them that Lady Graham was too delicate to make such a trip in winter."

In their private Pullman, Athene turned to her husband.

"I don't seem to feel the way I ought, Geoffrey," — she was visibly perturbed, — "about leaving my home. Poor dears — losing their one child." She brooded over a formula of pathos, as though by her lack of reaction she found herself wanting. "I blame myself," she went

on. "Of course, in a kind of way I mind very much indeed. All the associations of my childhood — that come to be like old friends — " She tried to come to grips with her conscience and could only relapse with a despairing "Is it terrible of me?" that had for him, in its solemnity, a certain lovely quaintness.

"I can only feel that it 's heavenly of you, darling." He took her hand in his and she could feel him trembling. "I can only be terribly, terribly grateful to you, my dear."

She gave him a look at once radiant and strangely placid.

"I 'm sure it 's going to be wonderful," she said.

VIII

That it was going to be wonderful became more and more during the voyage Athene Graham's creed and conviction; nor, in her delicate and intricate consciousness of all her thoughts, sensations, and actions, was there any registering of the fact that "it" — whatever it comprised of the glorious and uplifting — continued to be a "wonder" of the future.

She was, incidentally, aware of being happy; aware too of inspiring in Geoffrey a happiness whose sensitively passionate quality gave her, at moments, the queerest sense of having illumined depths beyond her comprehension. She would look at him across their discreetly cornered table in the dining saloon and think, "This is my husband," feeling him to be, in a supreme interpretation of the terms, creditable and charming. Charming, she told herself, in ways that must be peculiarly those of a young Englishman. Harking back in her mind to the works of Meredith and Henry James, and even Mrs. Humphry Ward,— for she detected in his vivid sympathies, in a certain violence of intellect combined with gen-

tleness of conduct, an affinity with the character of Robert Ellsmere,—she classified and loved him as a perfectly distinguished "type," and rejoiced in the deep traditions that he represented for her, and in the prospects he opened up for her of a sweet and ordered and stately life in the land of her earliest ancestors.

It was in such a mood that she stood beside her husband on the upper deck and saw the lights of Plymouth Harbor, like starry blossoms above the dark phosphorescence of the sea; heard a voice, passing behind them on the deck: "We ought to be in in less than an hour." Her fingers tightened on the rail.

"In less than an hour," she repeated, and flung up her head, breathing exhilaration from the raw salt wind.

"Darling—is it so exciting?" He was moved by her tone.

She nodded.

He could just discern her; her eyes looked enormous in the short, pale triangle of her face.

"It's marvelous," she said, and let her hand slip into his.

"Darling, I do think it's sweet of you."

"What is?" She was gazing over the water, as though fascinated by the far luminary pattern.

He spoke softly, watching her profile:—

"To be so—pleased."

She was silent, still staring and enchanted.

"To think that that's England!" she said at last. "Hidden quite near in the dark, and only those lights to show us where it is. Are the cliffs white here?"

"White in some places and red farther down the coast. Red sandstone, rising up in great crags out of the sea."

"This is the Cornish coast?" She drew her furs up more closely round her chin.

"This is actually Devonshire—"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, and he felt her start in delight. "Cream — and sailors — and cider! You see," she laughingly and caressingly went on, "how well I've learned my England in advance."

"My dear — you're so lovely," he said.

But she only smiled and let him hold her hand more tightly.

Again they were quiet, and he became aware of the gigantic pulsation of the ship, and, far below them, the hissing and roaring of the cloven waters. And he thought, "How queer that I should ever *not* have known her, and not have loved her! How queer that, at first, I should have imagined I could be merely a little in love with her." His sense of happiness had the dizzying quality of pain.

"Whistler could have done this," she said. "All this gold and darkness and mist. I have the reproduction of one of his Nocturnes in my boudoir at home."

He smiled, with a salt taste on his lips.

"The original is in the National Gallery."

"Then I must go and see it the very first moment I can! Oh," she cried, "there's such a heap of things I want to do and see!" The vitality of her anticipation gave ringing tones to her voice.

"Dearest!"

"To begin with," she swooped down to particular implications, "Christmas in England! Won't that be marvelous? Oh, Geoffrey, I'm just *dying* to see your family. I did think your mother's letter to me was perfectly sweet — 'My dear daughter-in-affection as well as in-law.' Lovely of her! Will they all be there?"

"I expect so."

"But doesn't your sister Patricia live in London?"

"Yes, but she comes home a lot, and always for Christmas."

"Is she going to get married?"

Geoffrey hesitated; somehow Patricia's affairs — even to Athene —

"There was —" he paused. "There is a young man who's in love with her."

"Will she marry him?"

"I don't know. I don't think so."

"What's his name?"

"Denis Mortlake. He's a journalist and has written one clever, rather bitter, novel."

"Denis Mortlake," she repeated. "He sounds romantic. I should have thought it would be very suitable —a writer and a sculptress."

"I doubt — in their case."

"Perhaps," Athene gravely concluded, "your sister cares only for her art."

"Oh, no." His tone had a vehement sadness. "Oh, no. Patricia isn't like that."

She was surprised; the suggestion had seemed to her reasonable and even splendid, for she had notions of the artistic temperament and a reverence for the Artist, spelling it mentally with a capital.

"I see," she said, with a vagueness intended to conciliate his sudden and obvious wish to be reserved. "And your other sister," she went on in a quick amiability, and felt his melancholy lighten. "Is she engaged or anything?"

"Oh, Bobs? I don't know what Bobs's views are at the moment. Last winter, when she was first at Oxford, she had some high-minded and logical theories about free love — though in fact she has the temperament of a rather sharp-tongued Diana. She may believe in polygamy at the moment. But I suspect," he smiled, "that sooner or later she'll soften down and settle down and become an exemplary wife to whichever of her many young men is lucky enough to get her."

"She must be — a character."

He said gently, "She 's a darling, really, and rather fine and fearless in her way. Much more so than Clifford, who 's a Sybarite and likes his comforts — and means to have them somehow, whatever happens to the rest of the world. And yet he 's so easy-going and ingenuous and like a great friendly puppy in his ways, that people are apt to like him better than Bobs. It was because of his debts, you know, that Mother could n't come over to our wedding."

"Gracious! I suppose he takes girls around quite a lot?"

"A certain amount. He has a susceptible heart and a mania for dancing."

She nodded. "That 's the way boys at home get cleared out, giving dinners and theatres, and suppers, and sending flowers and presents. Why, do you know, my cousin Rosamund did n't have to buy herself a single pair of gloves or silk stockings or a vanity case the whole of last year! And there was n't a single day when she had n't got roses in her bedroom!"

"Then I singularly failed with you," he exclaimed, with an odd, boyish ruefulness. "To provide you with presents, I mean. You see, darling, we don't at home — not to the same extent."

She flushed, and was grateful for the darkness, remembering her mother's dictum: "Well, he seems pretty mean, sending you nothing but a few flowers, and giving you that old ring. Why, in the first fortnight your father and I were engaged he gave me a pearl necklace, and two brooches from Tiffany's, and a bracelet."

She looked up at him. "My dear, I never dreamed of wanting you to; and it is n't as if that sort of tribute means anything in itself. I think your custom is much more dignified."

"I suppose," he ruminated, with an inflection of humor, "that I ought to have sent you orchids."

She shook her head.

"I don't care about orchids — we have so many," she added gravely.

"Absurd darling!" escaped from him, under his breath.

"What did you say?" she asked.

"Nothing — I was only amused at the idea of orchids."

She was puzzled and didn't reply; and he spoke in swift change of mood: —

"I suppose it's sentimental," — she smiled softly, for she'd never heard the phrase except recently, from him; funny British tang about it, — "but you do make me think of flowers, some kind of flowers." He continued with a deep, wondering look, "Jasmin, perhaps — something fragile, with a lovely scent and yet not a bit exotic, and white and clear — Oh, darling, I do hope I can make you happy!"

The harbor lights were nearer now, and through half-closed lashes she saw them as great blurs of gold. There were shadows darting to and fro on the quay; and above the harbor chips of tawny radiance, thick in the foreground and strewn more and more sparsely far up into the darkness beyond — a high, enigmatic darkness stretching on and on, and suddenly checked and subdued to an horizon by the greater infinity of the stars.

She could only whisper, "That's the future. That's England."

Now his gaze followed hers. He said finally, "A dark sky line."

She turned at an odd inflection in his voice.

"You mean — ?" And she felt him suddenly detached, sombre. "You mean — ?" she repeated.

"That the future isn't ours by gazing."

"Then," she said simply, "we must fight for it."

He was silent.

At last he seemed to question himself: "For the future? For all of us? The war that comes after war—" He broke off, and demanded of her in a painful, faintly mocking manner that she didn't know:—

"Darling, did you realize that I was dragging you into a battle?"

She touched his arm.

"Just what d' you mean?"

"The battle that's going on," he was staring toward the coast, "over there. You can't realize—it isn't possible for you, coming from such a land of promise, from such a climate of prosperity—you can't realize how incessantly we're all fighting—the majority of us without actually realizing how we struggle and what we're up against."

His words cut gashes across her picture of a stately England.

"Against what?" she asked.

He hesitated. "The phrase is 'post-war conditions.' The spirit of change and the spirit of reaction in a perpetual rough-and-tumble, disorganizing our whole power of progress. Some people clamoring for a reëstablishment of the past, taking inertia for peace and pre-war superficial prosperity for a condition of universal happiness; the other lot preferring to dash forward into anything, into chaos, so that their very passion for reform seems to have a sort of madness in it, a sort of despair. Sometimes it seems as though the very elements of progress—I mean a possibility of minimum prosperity and minimum tranquillity of mind—were lacking in us: as though our civilization might die, so to speak, from economic exposure."

She fearfully demanded:—

"But — will it? Could it die?"
His answer had a hesitant irony: —
"If we can gain the horizon — "
"You mean — you hope?"
"I hope — and believe," he said gravely.

PART TWO

I

Bobs stood on a ladder while her twin reclined with the grace of a Blake angel on the staircase.

"I shall kiss my new sister-in-law under it." Clifford gazed up at the huge bunch of mistletoe.

Bobs nodded; her mouth was full of string; she seized another branch of the mistletoe and bound it still more firmly to the chandelier.

"Look out you don't fall," he remarked, and threw the stub of his cigarette into the pile of evergreens on the hall floor.

Bobs took the string out of her mouth.

"You'll set them on fire." She had a cool, ringing voice.

"Too wet," he remarked. "There's still snow on some of that holly."

Bobs smiled down from her height.

"Seasonable weather, as everyone in the village said to everyone else in the village this morning. All the small urchins are tobogganing already on Locker's Hill."

A look of amusement touched Clifford's bright, lazy face.

"Winter Sports in Melbury — all the pleasures of St.-Moritz in the heart of Merrie England — the Cotswold Alps — " He broke off. "Oh, damn! I do think Father might let me go after Christmas with the Stantons' party. It's only for a fortnight, till the beginning of term. I don't see how he *can* call that extravagant."

Bobs climbed down, picked up the stepladder and placed it by the wall opposite the staircase, and began taking sprigs of holly.

"I don't like that sort of thing, and so of course it's difficult for me to see your point of view." She paused,

her steady eyes fixed on her brother. "Seems to me it's a profiteer pastime," she added.

Clifford thrust out his square, childish underlip.

"All you care for is Communist orgies, and cocoa, and burning incense at the shrine of Karl Marx." His tone lost in derision as it gained in gravity. "There's no doubt," he generalized, and felt all the weight of his "set" behind him, "there's no doubt that university life makes women less feminine." He paused, regarding her now with an air of portent. "Who was the Johnny who said that it's a sign of a decadent civilization when its women lose—" he hesitated for the judicious phrase.

"Lose their modesty? Or chastity, was n't it?" Bobs was remounting her ladder.

He frowned, still portentous.

"There! What? Well, using a word like that! Now other girls would n't dream—"

Bobs stuck a scarlet-berried branch over the portrait of her grandmother.

"Like Daffy Stanton, for instance," she suggested.

He nodded. "Exactly."

Bobs added another sprig of holly.

"Well," her voice was more coolly resonant than ever, "I confess Daffy Stanton shocks me."

"Shocks you? *Shocks* you?" he repeated in that genuine amazement which Bobs's remarks could rouse in him. "Why, Daffy—"

"Is the débutante *par excellence;* dances beautifully; plays tennis beautifully; lets every young man kiss her; and never says anything that any conventional person would object to or any intelligent person would want to hear. I think that's shocking."

"How can you talk about shocking, Bobs, when one of your greatest friends has lived for two years with a man she is n't married to?"

Bobs shook her head.

"It's the principle. I think it's much worse to be a parasitic débutante who kisses anyone than to live with and work for someone you love, and dispense with a legal ceremony that you simply don't believe in. Not," Bobs added, clambering down and moving her ladder again, "not that I don't think, personally, that there are things to be said for marriage."

Mary Graham, leaning over from the landing above, glanced down on the golden heads of her two youngest children: Bobs pretty and grave and efficient in her blue-and-white checked overall, Clifford sprawling with a funny, coltish elegance on the faded green stair-carpet. A smile, sweet yet mischievously ironical, woke in her fine dark eyes and curved the corners of her mouth. Bobs was a darling, a nice, absurd, rather indomitable darling.

"For instance — what?" she asked aloud.

Their faces were upturned, flushed and surprised.

"Oh, Mummie!"

She laughed down at them now.

"What," she demanded gently, "what *can* be said for marriage, Bobs?"

Bobs allowed herself a responsive amusement, but she was n't moved from her main line of thought.

"Well," she said, and her upward look rested in dispassionate affection on her mother, "considering social circumstances and prejudices, it's very often the only course; I mean, people marry because they are victims of their social circumstances, so to speak."

"Pretty negative argument," Clifford remarked. "I should say," he went on, with the air of having safely solved the problem, "that people marry because it is the right thing to do."

"A Daniel come to judgment!" Bobs remarked; but their mother broke in: —

"Anyway, I've just had a wire from the latest 'victims' to say that they'll be home just after five."

"Oh!" Bobs turned to her brother. "Clifford, you might help me. I do want to get the decorations done before they come, and there's only an hour and a half left."

Clifford yawned.

"Very well." He rose with reluctant amiability. "You get on the steps and I'll hand the stuff up to you."

They heard their mother go back into her room and close the door.

"Why doesn't Patricia come down and help?" he demanded.

"Why should she? She's frightfully tired after only getting down here last night, and Mum sent her to rest this afternoon."

For a few moments both were silent. Then Clifford asked:—

"What d' you think she will be like?"

"Athene, you mean?"

He nodded. "Mm. The be-eautiful American."

"I can't imagine. Of course Geoff seems to think she's quite perfect, and he has rather sober judgment on the whole," Bobs conceded.

Clifford absently stuck a piece of mistletoe in his buttonhole.

"You can never tell," he pronounced, "once a man's in love. However," his manner took on implications of experience, "there's no doubt, from her photo and from what old Geoff says, she's got looks—which is important; and all American women know how to dress—which is also important."

"As long," Bobs spoke with a certain acrid tone, "as long as that isn't her main occupation."

"I believe you pretend not to care for clothes."

Bobs wavered between her ideal and actual views of herself, between the young citizen untrammeled by "inessentials" and the more complex — and to her mind less fine — character that she knew herself to be. Her courage was in her reply.

"I try not to care." Her troubled look gave charm to her too easily "set" young face. "They're such a *stupid* temptation — especially," she admitted, "when you can't afford them."

"But Patricia cares."

Bobs said in swift defense, "That's different. Patricia's life is art — beauty, and so on. She needs beautiful things. That's quite different."

"I don't see the difference." Clifford had sunk on to an oak chest.

"I can't explain." Again Bobs's cool, wide look was troubled. "I can't explain if you can't feel it inside you. Patricia's not — not like us," she asserted. "She needs beauty — to feed her, in a way." She gazed gravely at her twin and her voice was gentle. "Because her life hasn't been, isn't, like ours."

Clifford nodded. "Yes, I see."

Bobs stood on her ladder, still gazing gravely down at him.

"I think we don't need consolations," she said. "We've got everything before us; we've escaped a good deal. That's why I feel we ought to behave decently, if we can. I mean, try not to want silly things when we've got so much, comparatively."

Clifford's faint moodiness returned, for he was touched by and a little resentful of his sister's words.

"I don't see," he said vaguely, "that we've got so much." He was thinking of his vetoed winter-sports scheme. "By the way," he added, "Jeremy Ford is going."

There was, on her part, a perceptible pause; then, "Going where?"

"To Switzerland, of course, with the Stantons' party. Lucky devil! That's the advantage of being in business, even if you do only make a few hundred a year. It makes you independent. Sometimes I think I shall chuck Oxford and try to get straight into some office."

"Oh," Bobs said in a small voice, and her color deepened. "Oh—" she repeated.

"They go on the third of January." Clifford was preoccupied and grim.

Bobs spoke a little breathlessly.

"I—I didn't know he was going." She felt a chill on her spirits, a quick beating of her heart. "He didn't say anything," she remarked casually.

"Oh, he only decided two days ago, apparently; that's since your golf with him. I happened to meet him this morning."

Since your golf— Bobs was sensible of chagrin, of a dragging, unhappy self-reproach. She'd been in an uncertain state of mind that afternoon. She'd found herself wanting to hurt him. She remembered her foolish generalization, as he drove her back: "All young men are so self-satisfied; they get puffed up with their scarcity value. It's more satisfactory for girls to have other interests in life." She remembered his expression as she said the words—as if she'd struck him across his nice tanned face; the change from his usual merry candor to silence; his look before he left her and drove off, miserable and rather bewildered.

"I—I didn't know Jeremy really cared about winter sports."

Clifford was lugubrious.

"Most people do."

Bobs reasserted with vehemence, "Only stupid, idle,

unreasonable people," and felt the tears rise and sting under her eyelids.

"You always seem to be down on Jeremy," Clifford remarked, and thought with regret of his sister's lack of judgment in choosing her friends.

II

PATRICIA sat by her window and watched the snowflakes fall from the darkening sky. They made her feel dizzy, their zigzag whirling and sudden sleepy hesitation, fragments of mad white beauty flocking down in the dusk.

She thought, "The trees look like phantoms"; their branches had a fleeting silvery fragility, like trees traceried in a dream, and the snow, lying over the garden and fields, was like sleep itself, so strange and quiet, and without track or shadow.

She leaned her forehead against the windowpane and half smiled as she found herself thinking a thought that had so often enchanted her in childhood: "Am I going up, or are the snowflakes coming down?"—like, in the train, "Am I rushing past, or are the telegraph poles running away?" She could feel herself, with an acute sense of lightness, going up, and up, pressing and rocketing upward, higher and higher, until sight and feeling were merged in one giddy sensation of soft, whirling cold.

A letter dropped from her lap to the carpet; the faint sound startled her back into the room. She bent down and picked it up; in the frozen twilight she could just discern the lines of small, thick, irregular writing, the scrawled triangular *D* signed at the bottom of the page. She pressed her hand nervously against her forehead; there was something of impatience, something of exhaustion in the gesture, and her mind cried in a kind of agony, "If only Denis would let me alone!" Her

vision became concentrated on a sentence: "I must see you soon, and in fact I shall, as I intend to come down to Yoxalls just after Christmas and talk you out of the sheer unreality of your attitude."

And she thought: "How can he be so stupid? So damnably stupid! As if there was anything 'unreal' in the fact that I don't and can't love him; as if that was n't too horribly real! Will he never take it in? Must I say to him again, and hurt us both so, 'I can't love you, because I love John Napier'?" Her train of thought, her feeling for Denis, was submerged by a deeper, more bitter pain, so that she sprang up and paced across the room, and even as she did so asked herself, "Will it always hurt like this whenever I think of him? Will it go on and on hurting so?" For it was six years since John had broken off their engagement, six years since he 'd married.

Standing before the fire, staring across the darkened room at the two tall, pale windows, she whispered, "I wish that he had died. I wish that he 'd been killed instead of maimed in the War." She fought with her blinding unhappiness. She told herself for the thousandth time: "Probably he was right. We could n't have endured poverty — all its ugliness, its wearing and tearing of our nerves. We might have grown to seem ordinary, irritating to each other, ground down and stupefied by ways and means." He 'd been so fiercely, wretchedly bitter about it, because, he said, he 'd known; because his parents had been clever and sensitive and poor; and because he remembered growing up in a household where a man and woman who had been lovers and happy had come, from incessant financial worries, to such a condition of nervous tension, and such a grinding sense of being deprived of beauty and peace and leisure, that they 'd grown almost to hate each other. She remembered his breaking tones: "Darling, Patricia darling, you

and I, with our tastes and ideas of living, on a mere pension! And with only my one arm to pull us any higher financially. Don't you see the absurdity, the ugliness of it? What's the good of going into a dream, and waking up in a nightmare?" And "Patricia, just because I love you so terribly I've got to be reasonable — for both of us."

Reasonable! Some other instinct in her cried, "Reason? If reason can only lead to this! Could anything — could the most sordid narrowness of circumstance, could disillusion itself, be so ugly as this — this mediocrity of existence, this awful, futile longing?"

And she thought without bitterness, only with a kind of aching wonder, that it must be different for him: that by now he had found happiness in his marriage and his new life. She thought of the girl he had married, without any resentment or jealousy, merely as a being in a world John had found for himself, a world which she didn't know. He had two children, and that knowledge too hurt her only in a dull, insidious way. Sometimes she wondered what they were like, whether they were like John himself, with his hard, sweet, nervous mouth and his heavy brows, or whether they were like the pretty girl she'd seen him with, three years ago, coming into the Savoy for luncheon. That was the only time she'd seen him in five years. He hadn't seen her, for she'd turned away quickly and gone out — out into the Strand among the people and traffic, feeling sick, as though she'd been hit in the stomach; and she remembered how she'd stood still outside Charing Cross and thought how funny it would be if she threw herself under a bus. Then she'd gone into a Lyons and ordered a cup of coffee.

Looking back, she was relieved that she hadn't killed herself. There was something messy — hysterical, about it. In Germany and Austria young people were always committing suicide now, often for no apparent reason.

There was something nauseating in the idea; a kind of gross lack of self-control, a spiritual sensuality about it. She'd gone back to her work that day; she didn't get through much, but the act gave her a sense of regaining her self-respect. The clay had felt dank under her fingers, and yet, as she worked, its masses had seemed to absorb the feverish currents of pain from her being, and finally, as the hours passed, to drag from her the last fierce, shameful elements of her impulse and seal them within its rough surfaces. That head had been — to her instinct and judgment — her first good piece of work. In her recent show she'd called it "The Rescuer"; and the critics had wondered why. And she knew that since then — the thing was obvious, a psychological-artistic truism: "They learn in suffering" — her work had gained in power and beauty; and yet from the very depths of her intuitions she was aware of futility; of its not being, even this sureness and rightness in her work, worth while.

The monetary success that had come to her lately, as a result of this power, only touched her with a faint, torturing irony.

Once more she went back to the window; it was dark now, and the snowflakes were dancing, ghostly and silent and incessant, against the glass.

She heard a knock at the door and turned to see Bobs's head poked in and a ray of light from the landing.

"Tea's ready, Pat."

"Oh — thank you."

"Tea," Bobs repeated, flinging the door wider, "and then the sister-in-law. Clifford," she added, with a giggle of amusement, "has gone off to his room to change his tie for the third time since lunch."

III

"TEA," gruffled Charles Graham, warming the seat of his breeches at the library fire and rocking slightly from his heels to his toes, "tea is a woman's meal. Fills you up and doesn't satisfy you."

Neither the sentiment nor its expression, in just these words, was new to his family. His wife could even remember various occasions during the summer of their engagement when he had driven herself and her mother down to Richmond, and had pronounced on the terrace of the Star and Garter Hotel, "No tea for me, thanks — tea is a ladies' meal"; and looked fondly at her across the white-spread table.

Now, as then, she poured out a cup and handed it to him, and he, according to an unspoken understanding, helped himself to three lumps of sugar.

"Well, dear," she asked, "did you come to any agreement with the vicar?" Her glance laughed a little, but her lips were grave.

He shook his head and the color deepened in his weathered red countenance. He squared his burly shoulders and rocked more emphatically on his toes and heels.

"The feller's as obstinate as a pig, and got no more respect for the beauty of his own church than if the place were a public house! I said to him, 'It's all very well, Summerbee, fillin' up the place for the Harvest Festival, stickin' fruit and corn and whatnot all over the place, and actin' the greengrocer.' (He didn't like that, I can tell you, as the only greengrocer for miles round is a Methodist.) 'That's symbolical, anyway, and can't be helped. But what you don't realize,' I said, 'is that the place isn't a bar parlor, to be got up for every festive season, but happens to be an ancient monument and a fine example of Gothic architecture. And by the time you've stuck green-

ery in every cranny, and choked up the screen with holly, and made the altar look like a Covent Garden stall, and hung a lot of red stuff round the pulpit so that it looks like old Mrs. Crippin from the workhouse in her flannel petticoat, the place is n't architecture at all any more.' There were the two old Miss Pottertons bringing in a lot of gold tinsel ribbon to tie things up, and Lady Rosenheim's chauffeur with a stack of carnations and crysanthemums; and Mrs. Summerbee goin' round with both the kids and sprinklin' artificial frost over the holly leaves, and Summerbee himself fussin' round with his mouth open."

Bobs choked over her tea.

"Oh, Daddy!" Her laughter choked her again. "Oh, Daddy, you 've made me do the nose trick, and it *is* so painful!"

Patricia held out a handkerchief. "Here you are."

The corners of Charles Graham's mouth twitched.

"My dear Bobs — can't think what upset you."

"The idea," Bobs giggled, "of Mr. Summerbee — "

Her mother, who had been looking at her watch, protested.

"Put that cup down, darling, or you 'll spill it again. Nearly half-past five. They ought to be here."

"Mr. Summerbee," Bobs gasped, "running round with his mouth open!"

Her father chuckled — a rich, growling chuckle.

"Poor old Summerbee!" He helped himself to a second scone. "Perhaps I was a bit rough on him. But the man really is such a driveling — "

His wife cut him short: —

"Dearest, he has a very hard life, and gets through a lot of useful work in the parish."

"That 's just like you, Mary; you always stick up for people."

Her very aspect, whenever he turned to her, seemed to

throw a softening light on him, and change his habitual air of rugged and faintly choleric assurance to a look of profound, wondering affection. In these moments there showed in his vividly blue eyes the sense — perhaps the more intense in him because he 'd never expressed it — of her significance; for she seemed to him unlike any other woman in the world, a source of peace and strength and understanding.

"But, Charles," she persisted, with that toss of her head that had struck him more than thirty years ago in what he 'd declared to be the handsomest girl he 'd ever set eyes on, "you do rather" — she hesitated — "ride your own hobbyhorse into poor dear Mr. Summerbee's domain." She turned suddenly, to listen to an imagined step in the hall. Patricia's look followed hers.

"Besides, Father," — Clifford was furtively giving the sheep-dog puppy a sandwich, — "you 'll lose votes if you 're not careful. If you offend the Summerbees *and* the Miss Pottertons, and half a dozen other people who 've probably sent decorations — "

"And," Patricia added, "who are all good Church and State Tories, and the cream of your electorate!"

Again Charles Graham chuckled.

"Then I shall have to rely on the Bolshy vote — eh, Bobs?"

Bobs flushed, but stood up for her principles.

"You know the word 'Bolshy' is just cant, and used by a lot of Die-Hards as a bogey."

Charles Graham ignored a glance of entreaty from his wife.

"A Die-Hard? Like your old reprobate of a father?"

Bobs began to look dangerous; there had been an occasion when, after a political argument with her father, she had packed a dispatch case and left the house on her bicycle, declaring that she could n't go on living in an at-

mosphere of capitalism and reaction. Now her mother broke in.

"Clifford, you 'll make that dog ill."

Bobs's attention was at once deflected.

"Clifford, don't, for goodness' sake. You know he was sick on my bed last night—"

Achilles turned a countenance of ineffable innocence on his mistress, his black square nose glistening, his eyes hardly discernible in the depths of woolly thatch that constituted his face. He came across to her, wriggling his gray person, and put an immense soft white paw on her knee. Bobs apostrophized him:—

"You 'll get fat, Achilles!"

Achilles showed an ingratiating pink tongue and wagged his tailless hindquarters.

"I wrote a poem to Achilles the other day," said Patricia. "I meant to send it you, Bobs. It began:—

> "Alas, how much more like a rug
> Achilles is, than like a dog!
> In fact, we know it 's Achilles
> Only by virtue of his fleas."

Clifford applauded. "Jolly good!"

Bobs turned on him with amiable scorn.

"You 'd probably have fleas, Clifford, if you were as woolly as he is."

"Now, Mother," Clifford appealed, half laughing, half annoyed, "is n't that a gross libel?"

Charles Graham had been peering out of the window. He returned to his former position in front of the blaze of logs.

"No sign of 'em yet. Awful weather for motoring."

"She 's probably used to cold," Patricia said. "Denis Mortlake"—she spoke the name naturally, and her gaze strayed with a dark, fierce candor from one to another member of her family—"was over in America last win-

ter. He says he's never felt such cold, even in the trenches in Flanders."

Mary Graham glanced at her elder daughter; took in the girl's defiantly impassive air, the tension of her eyelids and nostrils, the set of her beautifully shaped mouth, with its nervous, half-quizzical line between the lips.

"When's he coming down again to see us?"

Patricia cut herself a piece of cake.

"As a matter of fact, he suggested coming down for a day or two after Christmas." Her voice indicated neither interest nor disapproval.

"Is that the feller with his hair tumbling all over his eyes?"

Patricia's expression relaxed to one of her swift, flashing smiles.

"I expect so." Denis's hair was apt to fall on his forehead when he became excited in his talk.

Clifford made no comment, but his fresh, regular features indicated intense mistrust. He never felt at ease with Denis Mortlake, whose sarcasms irritated him and whose clothes and general air of impatient disarray appalled him.

"Would he come down for the Hunt Ball?" demanded Bobs, who had a theory that Patricia's complexes would be resolved by marriage, or, if permanence were unsuitable to their two temperaments, at any rate by a liaison with Denis.

"Don't see Mortlake at a Hunt Ball," Clifford grunted.

Patricia turned on him an impassive amusement.

"He looks rather well in a tail coat."

"Like a waiter," muttered Clifford, and felt Bobs kick his ankle.

Suddenly Achilles jumped up, putting his shaggy head on one side. The door at the other end of the library was flung open. A figure wrapped in dark furs hesitated on

the threshold; and Mary Graham, rising from behind the tea table, was struck with a view not merely of the girl's loveliness, but above all by her pure and radiant self-assurance.

IV

ATHENE came straight toward her husband's mother; she took Mary's outstretched hands in hers.

"I'm so glad—" she began.

"Dear Athene—Geoffrey—"

The girl was touched by the beauty of the older woman's voice, and by the deep, glowing gaze bent to hers.

"Darlings, welcome!" Now she kissed them both. "*What* cold faces! Charles, kiss your new daughter."

Athene was startled and vaguely pleased by a feeling of being treated like a child. The manner of the hearty-complexioned man, whose embrace savored of wet tweed and soap and tobacco, whose greeting had a decisive bluffness, made her wonder whether he might n't, as the next step in their acquaintance, pick her up by the waist and toss her above his head, and then, putting her down, tell her to run off and play.

There was, she increasingly felt as she was greeted by each member of the family,—sensible, in a kaleidoscopic sequence, of Patricia's vivid reserve, of Bobs's half-admiring, half-judicious glances, of Clifford's beaming, gallant approval,—the oddest blend in their united welcome, of warmth and casualness. Clifford's follow-up of his handshake by "You must have had a fearfully cold drive down" gave a lead to the general talk, and, banishing any more apt and emotional expressions from the stranger's lips, cut away, as it were, her preconceived platform from under her feet, and left her with this odd awareness of

being at the same time let down and let in; of being scarcely "received"—and yet immediately intimate.

"I expect," Bobs was saying, "that you're dying for a hot bath." She was taking in Athene's clothes, her detailed yet matter-of-fact elegance.

"Well, I am rather chilly."

Geoffrey pushed a large, worn, leather armchair closer to the blaze.

"Come and sit here, darling, and have tea first."

His mother went back to her place on the sofa. "I've just rung for some fresh tea," she said.

Patricia took up the cover of the hot dish.

"Father's finished all the scones!"

"Nonsense. Clifford's been feedin' that dog again." Charles Graham turned to his daughter-in-law. "What sort of a voyage did you have? Pretty rough, I expect?"

"Why, no. I thought it was glorious most of the time." She glanced at her husband as if for support of her verdict, and met his intent yet detached look. In that second it seemed to her that he was watching for some reaction in her behavior, and she gave him a smile of reassurance, as much to steady her own power of registering her impressions as to convey to him that she was delighted. "We had some wonderful blue-and-golden days," she continued, "and gorgeous, clear nights, with the moon shining like a great lamp up among the stars—a real 'honey moon.'"

Her poise, leaning a little forward in her chair, had a soft eloquence; she bent a liquid look on her mother-in-law. And Mary Graham, with a curious, intuitive shock, asked herself, "Does she care for him at all?" But she said aloud:—

"It must have been beautiful. Sugar, dear?"

And, observing Geoffrey's intentness on his wife, she thought, "Yes, Geoffrey adores her, and he's afraid she

may be disappointed in us, or that we may n't fully appreciate her."

"Is this the first time you've crossed the Atlantic?" Bobs asked.

"Indeed it is; I've been just dying to get to Europe ever since I had any ambitions at all. I've always felt I'd be at home over here."

"I hate the sea," Bobs declared. "I'm like Father; it gives me a liver whether I'm by it or on it."

"Oh—" Athene's was a murmur of vague, rather baffled sympathy.

"Fearful," Bobs continued. "It makes me look and feel yellow."

Athene, dubiously surveying Bobs's pink-and-white complexion with its powdering of freckles across the tip-tilted nose, took in that she was in earnest, and came out with a wondering but decisive "You should take Bromo-Seltzer then—my father just swears by it." She turned to Charles. "He gets a terrible liver sometimes."

"Does he, indeed? Horrid nuisance. I must say, I don't as a rule, except when I don't get enough exercise. All right when I'm down here and manage to hunt a bit and play tennis in the summer. But up in town you can't do it. Is n't the time, for one thing. A Parliamentary life is n't healthy—there's no doubt about that. Only healthy time is the election, when you *have* to go running round in the open air."

"I hope you'll take me to listen to some of the debates," Athene exclaimed. "I've always been terribly interested in politics over here. I made a study of your Constitution when I was doing economics and sociology at college. I had to read a paper on 'The Functions of a Second Chamber,' and I made a fairly considerable study in that of your House of Lords."

Bobs looked up with a new interest.

"And I should think you found it a fairly rickety structure of old playing cards?"

"Why, not at all," said Athene. "It only makes me glad to think of the existence of such a venerable institution."

"Hear! Hear!" from Clifford, triumphantly glancing at his twin.

"That's right, Athene, I see you've got the right kind of ideas." Charles Graham's grunts were half solemn, half humorous, and wholly approving.

The sounds of approbation, and Bobs's muttered "Of course, a foreigner," didn't at all disconcert Athene, who raised her fair, untroubled countenance to her father-in-law.

"Are you in the House of Lords?"

"Oh, no — no." Charles was faintly astonished.

"He hasn't," Bobs intervened, "any hereditary right to ruin the country."

"But of course — how stupid of me! I was forgetting you said you'd been elected."

Geoffrey broke in, laughing.

"I didn't warn you, darling, that the political atmosphere of the household was invigorated by this perpetual scrapping of reaction and revolution."

"Reaction — nonsense!" said Charles.

"Revolution's a scareword," Bobs pronounced. Their words came out simultaneously, and Athene was struck by the likeness in their manner and in the shake of their heads; one had a sense of stubbornness in each.

"While Geoffrey," Patricia amplified, "embodies moderation."

But Bobs asserted, with swift, hard emphasis, "People who preach economics on a full stomach can afford to be 'moderate.'"

She had a chivalrous imagination and an unreasoning

sensitiveness to whatever she conceived to be injustice.

"And you," Athene demanded of Patricia, "embody Art, I suppose?" Her question was earnest, even a little deferential, and she was surprised to see on Patricia's face a look that she'd often had cause to wonder at from her husband, a look at once quizzical and affectionate — and interested.

"Perhaps I do." Patricia's tones were husky and uneven, and her eyes, beneath their long, restless lids and heavy lashes, seemed to Athene to have a visionary quality — to hold in their flickering darkness a peculiar receptive power. Watching her now more closely, Athene felt her as perceiving much and betraying little; as being, with all her ability of expression, nervously and almost violently reserved. "Mysterious," Athene phrased it to herself; and became, through her vague intuitions of Patricia, more clearly conscious that Geoffrey too had something of this element — a deep and elusive understanding that played on the ordered solidities of his mind like lightning on a fine city, giving it swift, strange aspects, and holding, in its startling, forked illuminations, a power to destroy the very order that it enlightened.

Achilles came and laid his head on Athene's knee.

"Don't you think he's lovely?" Bobs asked.

Athene stared at him.

"Why, isn't he funny! A great bear of a dog with no tail. Did he never have a tail?"

"Never," said Clifford.

"Bobtail," Charles explained.

"Are they fashionable over here just now?"

"Not exactly. Rather a venerable institution," said Geoffrey. "Come here, Achilles."

"I expect Athene'd like to rest, and unpack a little before dinner."

Patricia rose. "I'll take you up."

Athene was grateful. She wanted to be alone to adjust her impressions. The space of time since her arrival had been cumulatively surprising. And now, taking in more detailed aspects of the library, its stacked, untidy shelves, the medley of heavy, comfortable furniture, the ugliness of the carpet and red plush curtains, the beauty of the Adams ceiling, she was prompted to wonder what she had expected, and to the provisional conclusion that anyway it was n't this; and to a final vague query as to just what was the quality in "this" that she had n't, and could n't have, envisaged.

Out in the hall Patricia said:—

"Don't you think Bobs's decorations are rather nice and cheerful?"

And Athene assented with a genuine "I think they're just lovely. The real Christmas atmosphere." For holly and mistletoe and the mellowed ancestral portraits and wide staircase were in her original "picture."

And on the threshold of her room she exclaimed, "Why, is n't this adorably quaint!"

The paneled walls, painted green; the crackling fire; the deep window seats at the three tall windows, the chintz, patterned with faded roses and carnations — her imagination took it all in.

"I think this is just perfectly adorable," she emphasized.

"I 'm glad — I hope they've brought you hot water. Yes, that's all right." Patricia's gaze returned to her sister-in-law. "Let me see you without your hat."

Athene threw her hat on the bed.

Patricia nodded.

"Good — oh, very good! I hope you don't mind — I shall do a head of you. There's a sort of," — Patricia hesitated,— "a sort of 'Winged Victory' look about your head."

"Winged Victory?" Athene was amused and interested. "Do I look so victorious?" she smiled.

"Well, aren't you?"

Athene adapted her tone to this balancing between the grave and the humorous. "I've never thought about it."

Patricia paused, holding the door-handle, and was touched by a feeling, half protective, half admiring, for this innocent sureness, this Olympian security, in Geoffrey's wife. But she only remarked:—

"I should have thought that was a proof."

"Of what?"

"Of being victorious," she said lightly.

Geoffrey came up half an hour later, to find Athene sitting in a dressing gown over the fire.

"You're all right?" He knocked out his pipe on the edge of the mantelpiece.

She raised a joyful face.

"Oh, Geoff, darling, it is too quaint! I've just taken my bath in the most comical great tub with a wooden platform around the top of it." She gave a little murmur of pleasure. "I wandered half a mile up steps and along corridors before I found it, and when I did there was the cutest little maid there, scrubbing it out, because she said your sister Bobs had been giving the dog his Christmas tub there early in the afternoon."

Geoffrey knelt down beside her, laughing.

"Oh, darling, darling! You must think we water the horses and clean the car in our one bathroom."

She laid her hand on his head.

"Well, I certainly should not be surprised. The little maid was ever so funny. She began chattering away to me, and she said, 'Her ladyship don't like Miss Bobs's bringing the dog in here, but it's too cold to bath him in the yard just now.' And she told me all about her fam-

ily, and how her father worked for Mr. Somebody, on the farm." Athene broke off. "Geoff, I love this room!"

He scanned her with quick, anxious adoration, and was reassured. She was so plainly delighted now, absorbed in the "quaintness" of her surroundings. She seemed to have got over a mental hesitation that had troubled him downstairs.

Absently he fingered the stuff of her dressing gown.

"Darling! Beloved! You think you'll be happy here?"

She smiled into his eyes, bending back her head as his face came close to hers.

"Do you?" He persisted.

She nodded. "Why, of course, darling."

He kissed her mouth and felt her quiet acquiescence, and drew back trembling.

She regarded him gravely.

"There isn't any need for you to worry about me."

"Worry!" he spoke in a breaking undertone. "Worry?" and she saw tears in his eyes. "I wonder — if you understand?"

Her gaze was limpid, beautiful.

"Understand?"

And suddenly he laid his head on her shoulder, and she could feel his hot forehead against her neck.

"Understand?" she repeated gently.

"How much I love you," he said.

V

ATHENE stirred. The sound of somebody moving briskly about the room; the clink of a tray being put down on the bedside table; the rattle of curtains being drawn back; a sense of white, flooding light; the glimpse of a pink print dress, a shining brass hot-water can. Athene blinked.

"Your tea, madam, and her ladyship asked if you was taking your breakfast upstairs?"

Athene checked a dazzled yawn.

"No, thank you. I'll be down to breakfast."

The girl went out, and Athene turned on her side to stare dreamily at the walls, out at the gray sky and frosted tree tops. Funny—really being here, at last. Funny, arriving yesterday evening, driving through the darkness, coming into the library, and finding them all. And dinner last night; all their faces lit by the four tall candles on the table: Sir Charles's red face above the whiteness of his shirt front; and Lady Graham, with her swift gentle laughter, her insistent, elusive dignity, her features so exquisitely touched with the first shadows of time; and the twins; and Geoffrey, with his black eyes and black eyebrows moving restlessly to the rhythm of his talk, jerking to his laughter, steadying to his arguments. He had laughed and talked a lot. She had been surprised by a mild boisterousness that seemed to come over him, making him suddenly very young, and, by her standards of him, unaccountable.

She glanced at his head, half buried in the pillow.

"Geoff?"

"Mmm." A muffled grunt.

She touched his shoulder.

"Do you think your mother likes me?"

He yawned, stretched his long limbs.

"Absurd darling!" He yawned again and opened his eyes.

"*Do* you think so?" She had n't been sure last night, conscious of some reservation in the older woman's mind.

"Darling, of course she does." He blinked and twitched his nostrils in the effort of disentangling his eyelashes. Through this preoccupation it seemed to him odd that Athene should have this doubt, for his mother's

good-night to him had been accompanied by "I think she has great possibilities"; and it struck him, from her, as more significant than any praise of obvious qualities. He repeated the words.

Athene hesitated. Possibilities? The notion was alien to her conception of herself, emphasizing an immaturity of which she was n't conscious. But she weighed the idea, as coming from a judgment which she 'd instinctively and immediately respected. "Possibilities of what?" She pushed back her tumbled hair from her brow.

"Of growth, I suppose." Sleep threatened to settle on him again.

"Spiritual growth?" Athene's gaze was reflective; the notion seemed interesting, yet irrelevant. After a few moments, she succored her bewilderment by a generalization: —

"I suppose all of us go on growing spiritually all our lives — and some of us more than others." This interpretation, resulting from that bias given to her whole mentality by her need to feel "right," magnified instead of belittling her personality and reëstablished her sense of being exceptional. And it was this sense, which was so far from ordinary vanity as to deepen rather than exempt her from a feeling of responsibility to her fellow beings, that made her add: —

"I hope that I shall justify her expectations of me."

Geoffrey blinked.

"You 've no idea," he murmured, "how delicious your profile looks against these pale green walls."

Almost imperceptibly she drew herself up against her pillows, and there flashed in her mind a suspicion that he did n't — that possibly he could n't — understand her.

He was gazing drowsily upward at her.

"Do you know your Browning? Do you appreciate

him? Didn't he catch you in your first romantic phase and keep a kind of hold on you ever since?

"If one could have that little head of hers
Painted upon a background of pure gold
Such as the Tuscan's early art prefers!
No shade encroaching on the matchless mould
Of those two lips, which should be opening soft
In the pure profile—"

He broke off: "Rather creditable to quote at this time."

The latter remark spoiled the quotation for her, so that, at the back of her mind, she still harped on this new aspect of their relationship: that, despite the intensity of his love for her, he shouldn't understand her. And she thought, with a high sweet tolerance: "Men don't understand women"; then remembered the phrase on her mother's lips and found it, on repetition, a little crude, a little cheap in relation to this actual rarefied question of being "understood."

There was a rapping at the door.

"Geoff!"

"Mm. Yes."

Clifford wandered in.

"Morning." His hair was rumpled straight up from his forehead, and his person was clad in a silk dressing gown of peculiar gorgeousness, beneath which were glimpses of yellow pajamas.

"Excuse me," he nodded to Athene, "but, Geoff, have you got any razor blades? I meant to get some yesterday and forgot."

He rubbed a judicious finger against his cherubic complexion.

Geoffrey finally roused himself and sat up.

"Yes, I expect so. Don't see why I should always supply you with them, though."

Bobs wandered in through the open door.

"Hello. Good morning."

Her cheeks were still flushed with sleep. She came and sat on the end of Athene's bed, looking like a nice drowsy little girl.

"I hope you slept well."

Geoffrey had got up and was rather truculently being drawn into a discussion on the merits of various razors.

"Beautifully," Athene replied.

"I've found," Clifford was saying, "that it doesn't really give you a clean shave."

Bobs turned to glance out of the window, and then back at Athene.

"It's stopped snowing, but I do wish the sun would come out!"

Achilles came padding and bounding in, sprang on to Athene's eiderdown, and, opening his cheerful jaws, deposited an immense bone.

"Oh," exclaimed Bobs affectionately, "darling Achilles! That's his favorite bone. He's had it for ages. Sometimes he buries it for a time in the garden or in the farmyard down the lane, and then digs it out again a week later."

Athene was anxious not to seem repelled by these odd confidences. "And has he just dug it out now?"

Bobs's attention was distracted. "What a pretty wrapper!"

She picked up a rose-colored garment that lay across a chair. "Did you have it for your trousseau?"

Athene nodded.

"It had just come straight from Paris when I got it."

Bobs's enchantment was unwilling but complete.

"It looks as if it had come straight out of a sunset, and was edged with fluffy clouds." She glanced down at her own old dressing gown, and was ashamed of the acute

chagrin and longing that possessed her. One ought n't to mind. It was inessential — frivolous. One was like the girls who gaped at shop windows, dazzled. It felt like rose petals, this wrapper. And half humanity was underpaid, or out of work, and wretched, and ugly. She let it drop from her grasp, and Athene wondered at her set, troubled expression.

Patricia's voice called from the landing: "If you want the bathroom after me, Bobs — "

Bobs rose. "Come on, Achilles."

VI

Mary Graham sat very upright in her armchair, but her hands were folded on her lap and her features were in repose.

She was conscious that the clock in the hall had recently struck ten; that Charles, on the opposite side of the hearth, was turning over the pages of a book at intervals that gave a sparse rhythm to their silence; that it was Christmas Eve.

Her consciousness was submerged in quiet, and she thought, "Christmas Eve"; and it seemed to her that the children were in bed, and that she and Charles had been tiptoeing about upstairs and filling the stockings hung out at the end of each bed.

Six stockings — Philip and Antony, Geoff, Patricia, Clifford, and Bobs.

Philip was getting almost too big to have a stocking. Next year, when he was at Eton, he would n't want one, perhaps. But once you let them grow up, they might never stop. One day Philip and Antony would be grown up; and then Geoffrey; and Patricia's long legs covered by skirts; and one day even the fat twins — She thought of them as all lying upstairs asleep. The two brown cots

in the night nursery, and Geoffrey promoted to share the room with his elder brothers, and Patricia, all her dolls' beds ranged close to hers. One day Patricia would have children, and look after them and adore them as she did her dolls. And, looking forward through the years that had been, Mary smiled beneath peaceful eyelids, because those years seemed so lovely and full of promise.

Charles dropped his paper knife; she started, and opened her eyes. She saw his gray head bent as he leaned forward to pick up the paper knife, and she remembered: that the children were n't asleep upstairs, and that Antony had been killed, and Philip. And, looking at Charles as he resumed his book and put his pipe between his lips again, she told herself that he had almost forgotten them; that he was absorbed by the present, with its problems and grievances and satisfactions; strengthened by the egotism of healthy age; vitalized by his very prejudices; untroubled by any sleeplessness of the imagination. Nine years ago, when first one and then the second of those telegrams came, he had cried in her arms like a huge, terrified child, and in the subsequent six months she had had to give up her hospital work because he could n't bear her to leave him alone.

She wondered what he would say if she were to remind him now. He never spoke of them, except incidentally. Last year he had sold Antony's saddle to a harness dealer in Melbury. So he could dispose of their memories.

He looked up.

"If it 's fine to-morrow, some of us can walk to church. Otherwise the car 'll have to make two journeys."

Her pause was one of mental readjustment.

"There 's Geoffrey's small car," she said.

"True. So there is. He can take Athene, and Bobs or Clifford on the dickey." Charles liked to arrange things. He called it "preparing for eventualities."

"Pretty gal, Athene," he pronounced, knocking out his pipe. "These Americans," he added, "have got a look of breeding about them." He was struck by something in her manner, and asked with bluff gentleness, "Anything the matter, my dear?"

She shook her head, but her gesture, stretching out her hand to him, groped for sympathy.

He came and bent over her, and then, seating himself on the arm of her chair, took both her hands in his.

"Something worrying you, dear?"

She leaned her head against the familiar bulk of his shoulder.

"Darling old bear!" she half smiled.

"What's the matter?" He knew the signs. Women were funny creatures, even Mary. Had their moods.

She was silent. She wouldn't remind him. Once he remembered he would be unhappy, with the extra compunction of having — *not* having thought of it. But his shoulder was comforting, and his big hands holding hers.

"Just a mood," she murmured, telling him what she knew he thought.

He nodded. But he hated her to be unhappy. Her serenity was so much a part of his notion of her. Her unhappiness upset and hurt him. Feeling this, she relieved his perplexity by reverting to his comment on Athene.

"She's more than pretty; and she's got character."

She could feel in his chest an inflation of returning buoyancy.

"Fine combination in a woman. It's character that tells in the end."

"Of course she's still — still very young, very — immature in all sorts of ways."

"She's twenty-two, isn't she?"

"Yes. But perhaps her upbringing has kept her from getting much variety in experience. It 's that probably." She paused, trying to express what she perceived to be, in the girl, a charming, yet at moments a possibly irritating, blend of extreme efficiency and vague inadequacy; of depths varied by quite unaccountable shallows; of the strongest sincerity freaked by insincerities, which were on the girl's part so unconscious as to afflict Mary with the sense that they were conceivably incurable.

She probably needed experience — violent experience, instinct added. And yet, the thought of her pitched from her golden flight —

He patted her hand; "I don't quite see what you 're driving at."

"It 'll probably all work out," she said aloud.

"What will, my dear?"

"Athene and Geoff."

"But is n't it perfectly satisfactory?" It was in his nature to mistrust such reservations, and yet, conflictingly, from his experience of her to revere them. In fact, he accounted for her occasional rightness, in cases where he saw an obviously opposite condition, by the phenomenon that women had a kind of intuition. But he reasoned it out to her: —

"They 're young, and healthy, and got plenty of looks, and plenty of money, and they 're both of them intelligent. Seems to me it could n't be more satisfactory, my dear."

She bent her head.

"I know I 'm being silly."

Her voice touched him obscurely.

"You 're tired, dearest," he said.

VII

"HARK, the *her*ald angels sing
Glory *to* the new-born King.
Peace on earth and mercy mild,
God and *sin*ners *rec*onciled."

CHARLES GRAHAM squared his shoulders and roared out the familiar rhythm. He liked to let himself go over Christmas hymns. Athene observed that, on her other side, Geoffrey too seemed inspired to vociferous joviality; that he too squared his shoulders, held up his hymn-book without apparently any need to refer to it, and threw back his dark head, his features showing a delighted fervor. On the other side of Charles, Patricia's clear contralto. Beyond her, Clifford, a spruce chanting cherub, his hair suffused by a shaft of sunlight from the south window. Beyond Clifford, Bobs and her mother.

"Born to *save* the sons of *earth*,
Born to *give* them second birth.
Hark, the *her*-ald angels sing,
Glo-ry-y *to* the new — born — King!"

She looked at the choir — little rosy-faced penguins and older grizzled penguins, all with their mouths wide open. She watched the vicar, in his snowy surplice, proceed with a sanctimonious progression of his square boots, across the nave and up the steps of the pulpit, into which he settled, singing.

The vicar's jaw worked under his tanned skin as he sang; his gaze seemed fixed on some vague distance above and beyond his congregation. Mechanically he ran his hand over his brow and crisp gray hair, and tugged at the neck of his cassock, and adjusted his stole. Then he produced a handkerchief with an air of doing so by sleight of hand, and blew his nose and dabbed his brow

above the faint, peaked eyebrows, all the time singing and gazing into the distance.

Patricia, glancing at Athene's profile, wondered what she was thinking. She saw a momentary amusement, a steady observation, the square delicate chin lifted and then sinking again into her furs. Patricia wondered what Denis would make of Athene — Denis, who hated Americans and loved beauty; who railed against luxury and loathed discomfort; whose antagonism to the sentimental was undermined by pity for his own disillusionment. There was something muddled and violently pathetic about Denis's states of mind; yet at moments his perceptions flared to a kind of hysterical clarity.

Patricia caught sight of Jeremy Ford and his mother on the other side of the aisle. And in the pew behind them the Stantons; Daffy Stanton in a green hat that suited her loud piquancy.

Bobs had been conscious of Jeremy's presence ever since the beginning of the service. She had seen him come in late with his mother. Now that the hymn had ended and the congregation had settled itself to hear Mr. Summerbee's Christmas message, Bobs managed to seat herself a little sideways, so that she could, with all the appearance of gazing up at the vicar, observe Jeremy. She would have liked to look directly at him, but whenever she made up her mind to do so, she was checked by the fear of somehow betraying herself, and, with a jolt of pride, sat more upright, drawing down her level brows.

Jeremy, tense and miserable, had sung through the hymns and psalms with a furious, droning cheerfulness that disconcerted his mother, and composed himself to endure the sermon with as great a show of nonchalance as possible. He kept asking himself why she 'd turned so "beastly" to him. They had been such good friends; and he 'd begun to hope — to believe — And, after all,

lots of couples did live on five hundred a year with prospects in the firm — since old Maltby took an interest in him, and was always particularly decent to him. And Bobs, that was what was so decent about her, though it was mixed up with all her comic socialistic notions — Bobs was n't always wanting things, spending a lot. They could have a small flat in town. After all, five hundred — if you had n't high standards — He could sell the car — he 'd only bought it six months ago — for two hundred pounds; the man had promised him that. It would do for furnishing. But Bobs's head was still turned rigidly toward the pulpit, and his dream only hurt him. His mother, who was like a thrush, — it was from her he had inherited his freckles, — cocked an anxious glance at him for she had heard him tossing about at night lately.

Mr. Summerbee droned out: "Christmas is a time of peace. Peace on earth. The Christmas message is peace to all men, peace on earth and mercy mild." He went on and on, hypnotized by the flow of his own platitudes. The only interruptions were the occasional sneezes and coughs of the congregation. Patricia looked at Mrs. Summerbee and wondered if she found Mr. Summerbee dull, stupid. But Mrs. Summerbee's intelligence was cross-grained with incessant small anxieties; hers was n't the kind of life in which you could stop and wonder whether your husband was dull. Dullness was a luxury, like amusement. So many people just lived and "managed." Once Mrs. Summerbee must have been pretty; but now she wore an ugly hat and looked pinched. Her life, and the lives of her kind, had n't even the glamour of being a tragedy. Patricia's mind turned, in contrast, to the prospects of Geoffrey and Athene; they would n't have to manage, to live the same life in the same place week after week until the end of their lives. Athene would never wear an ugly hat; they could seek happiness as something important, and

their unhappiness could be tragic. And Patricia thought: "The paths of dutiful mediocrity are the most difficult of all. I pity myself — and Mrs. Summerbee does n't even do that. I tell myself my youth is being wasted — and she spent hers as ungrudgingly as she 'll spend her whole life. Self-conscious egotism! I see the world as wrong and ugly in all sorts of ways, and I turn from it to what I like to call my 'art.' She simply does good whenever she can, and does n't think of cosmic wrongs."

Mr. Summerbee concluded his sermon. As they rose for the last hymn, Patricia was struck by Bobs's expression: there were tears in her eyes and her lips were compressed as though in anger. Patricia had wondered about Bobs lately. She 'd seemed restless, by turns resentful and unusually gentle.

As they came out of the church after the service, Patricia saw Bobs take Athene by the arm and heard her "Will you walk home with me? I think one needs some exercise before lunch." And Athene's "Of course, I 'd love to"; and she observed Athene's amiable though somewhat surprised air as Bobs hurried her out of the churchyard and up the village street before most of the congregation had emerged. Turning, Patricia came face to face with Jeremy Ford, and saw his look as he realized Bobs's retreat.

"Merry Christmas, Miss Graham," Mrs. Ford greeted her.

Patricia replied suitably. "So it *is* Jeremy," she thought, and smiled at him with an impulse to reassure his forlornness.

"You 'll be at the Hunt Ball next week?"

He nodded. "I suppose so. You 're going?"

"Oh, yes, all of us."

He moistened his lips and his cheerfulness was visibly an effort.

"Ask Bobs to keep me some dances."

He looked so young and wretched that Patricia's nerves ached for him.

"Of course she will."

She saw a swift compunction in his look as he added:—

"And will you? Keep me a dance, I mean?"

She saw him appalled at a possibility of having hurt her feelings in his longing to get some assurance of a dance with Bobs.

"I should love to, Jeremy." And again she gave him a smile of intense friendliness. And she reflected: "Jeremy is one of the kindest people in the world. He belongs to the millennium, he's so essentially good. Bobs would be—lucky."

"What an atmosphere!" her father was exclaiming to Mrs. Stanton, and his tones fairly trumpeted in the crisp air. "The church is like a Turkish bath!"

And Daffy Stanton's giggling emphasis to Clifford:—

"Yes, quite marvelous, I thought. . . . And her legs are each insured for two thousand pounds—"

And Clifford, leaning on his stick, worldly and judicious:—

"She told me herself—I met her at a party at the Deauville not long ago—that she has her ankles washed in champagne every morning. A jolly good notion, I dare say."

VIII

Bobs's manner, as she and Athene paced up the street and turned the corner by the Beetle and Wedge, was apologetic.

"As a matter of fact," she came out with, "there was somebody I didn't want to see. And I couldn't very well go off by myself. I hope you don't mind?"

"Why, of course not — but — " Athene found the situation diverting. How strange that this grave and definite young woman should want to run away from someone.

Bobs felt Athene was going to ask for a more particularized statement, and stemmed her questions by "I'd rather not explain any more, if you don't mind." The truth was more intimate than she cared to admit, even to herself, and mild falsehood was against her nature as well as her principles.

"The queerest child I ever — " thought Athene. Aloud, she commented on the picturesqueness of the street, on the cottages of golden-gray stone, with steep roofs weathered to brown reds and russet greens.

"Yes," Bobs said, "it is beautiful. I expect Geoff has shown you some of the water colors he's done round here."

"He's scarcely had time yet."

"Did he do any in America?"

"I don't think so. I don't imagine he could have, the way he was tearing around."

"I expect he'd have liked to. He cares a lot about it. He's got quite a bit of the artistic in him, really."

She jerked to another question: —

"Where shall you live?"

"I imagine we shall take some sort of an apartment in London."

"Won't you take a house?"

Athene smiled. "Yes, I suppose really we will. I was thinking in American terms."

"Fun — lovely for you." Involuntarily Bobs's voice struck a forlorn note.

"What — getting a house?"

"Yes. Settling in, and deciding everything with each other, and choosing things together." She broke

off, and added curtly, "At least, there's a kind of popular sentiment that that's fun."

"And it will be." Athene was clear that it would n't only be fun, but important, this choosing of one's background. "I should like an old-fashioned house in London," she went on. "At home everybody just builds luxurious mansions; you don't get 'atmosphere' that way."

Bobs pondered. "I think 'atmosphere' depends on the sort of people who live in a house."

Athene hesitated. "Oh, of course, psychological atmosphere counts too," she agreed.

"Dogs and children are a necessity," Bobs observed. "How many will you have?"

The question came with such serene candor that Athene's "What, dogs or children?" was thrown out to hide any possible betrayal of surprise.

"Children, of course."

"Well — I don't mean to have any for some time."

"Why not?"

Bobs's manner was so far from the impertinent or even the inquisitive, so entirely expressive of friendly interest, that Athene was drawn to the same plane of detached discussion.

"Because — because there's so much I want to see and do first. It is n't only that I want plenty of time to express myself and develop my own character in these new surroundings; but when I've gotten more" — she paused, seeking Geoffrey's word — "more 'acclimatized,' then I want really to *do* something; to get something done."

"Public work, you mean?"

Athene's look was keen, her face tilted upward to meet the frosty sunlight.

"Yes, of some kind. Naturally I have n't got it all

mapped out in detail yet. But I was very much impressed with what Geoffrey said to me about conditions in this country — poverty and so on. I haven't come into contact with that at home. When we're settled in London, I mean to start investigating."

"I should love to help you if I could be of any use — out of term time, of course."

"I'd be delighted, Bobs. My notion is to investigate your social problem from both sides. To have a good look into conditions; visit the slums and all that, as well as collecting statistics about it all; see what the trouble is, so to speak. And secondly, to find out just what's being done by philanthropic organizations, and by the politicians."

"And then?" There was no doubt now in Bobs's question. These phrases revived and strengthened a purpose which had been somehow dissipated by an unwelcome preoccupation with Athene. Now, pacing side by side with Athene, she felt herself regaining balance.

"Then," Athene announced, "I shall have it properly worked out in my mind what Geoffrey and I are most called upon to do." Bobs demanded a final reassurance. "And you are absolutely democratic?"

"I am."

"Personally," Bobs spoke with a defiance which her family's alternative mockery or opposition had made inseparable from her expressions of political opinion, "personally, I'm inclined to think a Soviet — "

Athene's sympathy visibly staggered.

"Soviet!"

"Yes. Things couldn't be worse. A revolution would be a good thing."

But Athene's romanticism protested.

"There's no need, surely, to destroy so much. My idea is that there can be a moderate Socialism which

will just operate against any kind of a revolution by being democratic and progressive."

Bobs was emphatic. "That's merely modern Conservatism — wanting to give away your cake and have it. As Denis Mortlake said when we were all discussing it once, 'The new Dives likes the gesture of asking Lazarus in to have a cocktail.'"

"Oh, he's your sister's beau, isn't he?"

"Who? Denis?"

"Yes."

"You mean he's in love with her?"

Athene acquiesced.

"Yes," said Bobs. "And I think it's a pity she isn't with him. At least, she thinks she isn't."

"Being in love is so queer. You never know what it *is* all made of."

"But surely, I should think," Bobs interpolated, "you don't need to know; you've only got to feel, and then it's quite simple."

Athene checked a reply that it was, anyway for some people, very far from simple; that positively, perhaps for exceptional people, the condition was tortuous. But to her husband's sister she could only allow herself the remark that it was all "very subtle"; and then, reverting to the subject of Denis Mortlake:—

"Is he a Socialist?"

Bobs weighed her reply. "You can never tell with Denis. He tries to see both sides, and the result is that he's — sort of ironical about everything. Patricia says he's an emotionalist."

"But he must be very interesting. He's a writer, Geoffrey told me."

"I hated his novel."

"What was it called?"

"*Dust Heaps.* It's all about how disillusioned all

the young men are who fought in the War; and how they find work and pleasure and everything futile."

After a pause Athene said: "Somehow that seems to me very tragical—a young man feeling that way. Maybe if Patricia married him—"

"Exactly," said Bobs. "It's probably a repression."

IX

Patricia saw Denis come toward her up the platform. He pushed past an elderly woman, causing her to drop a rug and a parcel; and Patricia reflected, "He has no manners," and frowned, so that his first remark was "You seem disconcerted by my arrival."

His narrowed glance took in that she looked tired, and that her hat didn't suit her.

She said calmly: "I wasn't thinking about that."

He gave up his tickets to the collector.

"Of what, then?"

"I really don't know." It was just like him to provoke her to impatience in the first moments of their meeting.

He flung his suitcase into the back of the car.

"You chilled my nicely prepared effusiveness. Cassandra in a railway station."

She laughed, and settled herself beside him in the driving seat.

"Was it as bad as that?" She felt him look at her again.

And again he thought, "How awful her hat is—like a lemon squeezer." And the beauty of her tired eyelids made him say sharply:—

"It was obvious *you* hadn't prepared any effusiveness."

She didn't answer. She knew this sulky aggressive-

ness in him; it made her feel both guilty and scornful. She pushed down the accelerator, and he gripped the side of the car as they swerved between a lorry and a farm cart.

"How did you spend Christmas?" she asked.

"Does that really interest you?"

She spoke wearily: "Can you take nothing for granted? It's so — cheap."

He cut her short.

"Very well. You can have the complete record. On Christmas Eve I dined with my mother, who told me all about some new 'messages' she'd been getting from my father. I then proceeded to one of Cora Mallinson's literary gatherings, where we were all terribly amusing and outspoken and cynical and improper, Cora herself telling naughty stories like a two-year-old, and brewing punch for her guests, and looking all the time the nice mother of a nice large family, which Nature obviously designed her to be, and Art, in the guise of her dreadful pictures, prevented her from becoming. The punch was horrible — made of Listerine, I think. On Christmas Day I stayed in bed until one, and wrote you a letter, which I then burned. In the afternoon I tried to write, and found my new novel so dull that I foresee I shall never bring myself to correct the typescript, far less the proofs. I dined with a man who was at school with me, and then in the same regiment; I was best man to him at his wedding, just after the War. His wife was there, and his mistress, a dull girl with a loud voice and a monocle. After dinner we went and danced at the Yellow Peacock, and his wife asked me to come to Paris with her this week. I said I never went anywhere but to Brighton, and that I only went there at Whitsun. She took my refusal very nicely, and gave me to understand that she realized I had other

kinds of interests. About two in the morning we all went on to a party in the rooms of some girl in another lot of people we'd got joined on to. Everyone there was drunk, so that there was a general feeling that the party was a success; and the girl with the monocle, who'd been at dinner, lost her heart to Merrick Graven, and sat on his knee with her arms round his neck, while he talked to Heddon about his new play that Heddon's producing, and which is having trouble with the censor." He paused, then added, "What fun chaps have!"

Patricia looked sideways at his profile: the keen nose, the short upper lip, the sulky mouth and chin, the restless intelligence of glance.

"I wonder why you — we tolerate that kind of people."

His head was bent as he tried to light a cigarette against the rush of air.

"Amusing. Copy."

"But they aren't amusing, and they aren't worth 'copying.' You despise them, and so do I, and yet—"

He lit his third match.

"We sell our souls to our terror of boredom," he said savagely.

"Fear of reality," she thought. "You miss the thing that matters, and, because you're afraid of realizing that you've missed essential happiness, you scavenge for sensations, amusements." Her accusation was as much for herself as for him; and she was assailed by a bitterness against John. "If I could stop caring about him, I should be free. I could live clearly, work and think independently." But her cry echoed falsely in her mind, for her love for John beat below the surfaces of her existence, and gave her, by its rhythm of pain, a sense of his being intimately and vitally alive for her

—of their relation being still, in some way, unfulfilled.

Denis threw away match and cigarette and sat in silence, his arms folded. He was wondering whether his idea, that if Patricia married him he would be happy, was sentimental. The notion of sentimentality afflicted him—falsehood tied up in pink ribbons, the ugly contours of insincerity swathed in tulle. At least, in an age of credulity one need n't compromise with one's own feelings or those of other people.

"I 'm trying to envisage our married life."

She started. "Ours?" And then softened.

"Denis," she pleaded.

Her pity exasperated him.

"It would probably be hideous," he said. "I should be neurasthenic and jealous, and you,"—he saw tears in her eyes, and a desire to torment her seized him,—"you would find me repulsive, egotistic, boring, and you 'd only be able to think of—"

She laid her hand on his arm.

"Don't, Denis!"

Her touch, her violent defensiveness, unnerved him.

"You 'll drive me to some wrecking stupidity."

"I asked you not to come. To leave me alone."

He was suddenly morose again.

"You don't know your own mind." He changed the subject.

"What 's Geoffrey's 'Ziegfeld Folly' like?"

She smiled nervously; his recoveries had the quick resilience of egotism.

"Athene?"

"Is that her name? Is she such a beauty as Geoffrey reported to you all?"

"Yes. Quite lovely."

"And damnably dull?"

"On the contrary. Very much alive."

"And stuck about with dollars?"

"She is n't — consciously; she 's rather dignified."

"She sounds a paragon of a stage heroine. And 'Athene'— what a name! D' you remember your mythological textbooks? The owl, sacred to Pallas Athene? And the excellent Geoffrey makes an excellent husband, I imagine?"

"He 's very happy, very much in love."

It seemed to him that her tone was meant to rebuke his flippancy, and he countered: —

"You like the idyllic — from a distance."

But her answer was simple: —

"I 'm only so glad that Geoff 's happy. He 's such a darling, and demands so little for himself."

"Fortunate, for I imagine she 'll demand a good deal."

"Why should you think that? You 've never seen —"

"Most American women are brought up to be goddesses, idols, female Molochs, demanding the men's very souls as sacrifice."

They drove in through the gates and sighted the white, low house, between the trees.

"But are Englishwomen any better?"

He hesitated.

"Not all, certainly. But as egotists they suffer from lack of tradition, from Molochism having been for centuries rather the male prerogative. They 've always had such a lot of children and such a lot of duties. Not," he added, "that the change has n't set in. Emancipate women, and you emancipate quantities of powerful female selfishness. They 're getting free to be selfish, as only men could be selfish forty years ago. 'The dutiful daughter,' 'the obedient wife,' 'the devoted mother,' used to be a commonplace, and is becoming a paragon. But it 's been for America to provide the perfect circum-

stances for the mass production of selfish women: millions of women who have no responsibilities, and possibly one child, often none, — enough money to get into debt; enough leisure to make bridge and the consumption of illicit liquor and the seeking of illicit love affairs blessed antidotes against boredom."

"And the men?"

"Go from what's pretty well their intellectual cradles into business, and finally emerge sufficiently wealthy to ensure that their daughters may continue to be as the polished corners of a high-class brothel."

"Obviously you exaggerate."

"I —"

But as he spoke there was a welcoming shout from the lawn — Geoffrey and Bobs and Athene. Athene with her skirts and hair blown by the wind, laughing and holding up a stick for the bounding Achilles. Patricia slowed down. She came toward the car, still laughing and still flourishing the stick above her head.

Patricia couldn't refrain from a murmur of "This is 'Moloch,' Denis," and observed his expression of chagrined interest.

"Athene masquerading as a dryad," he observed.

X

[*Athene Graham to Rosamund Page*]

YOXALLS, NR. MELBURY

ROSAMUND DEAR, —

It was darling of you to cable, and I have been intending to write ever since it arrived here on Christmas Day. And now it's New Year — a new year, and a new life, and a new-old country. I'd never have guessed at such changes last New Year, when we were both in Philadelphia.

Anyway, here I am, and my impressions, which you (cynically?) asked me to send you, are not much clearer

than the day I arrived. In fact, I should say they were infinitely clearer before I ever got here at all. I keep trying to piece them all together, and it always ends in my throwing down all the pieces of the puzzle in a perfect despair, because I feel I 'll never get them to fit properly. Then I try cataloguing the things that strike me as queer. For instance, chimney pots, that perfect ocean of chimney pots sticking up as you come into London; and newspaper placards with the headlines printed out like giant visiting cards; and the way the porters all call me "Miss"; and the comical little railway compartments in the trains; and the way all the buses are painted scarlet and all plastered about with advertising matter.

But all these kinds of things are trivial and just local color, and all the time I 'm trying to get deeper. But they don't strike me as easy people to get deep with. It is n't that they are n't all perfectly sweet and darling to me, but they have n't the gift of intimacy. They have a way of kind of isolating themselves, even when they 're being most friendly. Very likely I 'm wrong, and will judge this better later, but that is the feeling they give me in this family.

For instance, when I said to Geoffrey's young sister, Bobs, that I believed she and I were going to be the greatest friends, she said, "Oh, of course," in a brisk kind of way, as though I 'd said something embarrassing.

In the same way I said last evening to Geoffrey's mother, who is a very lovely person and has heaps of dignity and character, that I believed marriage could be a very beautiful and helpful institution, both to the individual and to society in general, and that I hoped that my marriage with her son would be that kind of marriage. And she looked at me for quite some time, in a way I could n't make out (she mystifies me, though she does seem so extra straightforward and sincere), and then she said, terribly seriously, "I hope so, my dear." And that was all she did say, so that she did n't give me any real impression of what she was feeling, and did n't, if you see what I 'm getting at, advance our intimacy. And all the same she gives me the feeling of being a very "sympathetic" woman.

My father-in-law is a peach of an old man, and we get along wonderfully together. He 's far more the type I 'd

sort of expected than the rest of the family, except perhaps the son Clifford, who 's always making me dance with him to his Victrola, and runs around a good bit after a girl they call " Daffy," who 's cut very much on your pattern, I should say — very smart, and never went to college, and gets all the men crazy about her.

There 's a young man came down here yesterday who wants to marry Patricia (that 's the sculptress sister), and she won't have him. He 's a writer, and very intellectual, and broad in his views. A most interesting talker, though he 's queerly rude in his manner and outspoken. I 'm not sure that he is n't even rather decadent in his ideas; but that may be just his hair and clothes. But it seems to me that very often it 's that kind of man who can more easily understand a woman than the more conventional kind. Anyway, when I told him last evening this feeling I have, of not getting intimate with my surroundings, he said, " The deductions from intimacy may be intellectual, but the actual conditions must come through the emotions; you can't psychologize by Baedeker."

It seems to me he struck just what I do need. I feel I have to have emotional contacts in order to realize and to assimilate any surroundings. And that 's what the family are n't giving me. Maybe when I get to London, and meet more people, and begin to investigate the wider problems and interests of life over here, I shall feel less of an unintelligent spectator.

To-night (in fact, I must stop and dress) we go to the Hunt Ball, which should be a most delightful spectacle, and lots of fun. My father-in-law is going to wear a scarlet tail coat (I saw it put out in his dressing room as I passed the door a little while ago), and will certainly look a picture. To-morrow morning we drive to the meet, which will be about two miles off.

Write to me and tell me all the gossip of Washington. Mother seems very low in her mind since I 've gone, and writes that Poppa is troubled about business affairs, and is n't sleeping at night. I think the two of them should take a trip around the world to make them feel more cheerful.

Ever your devoted cousin,

ATHENE GRAHAM

P.S. The name of the writer is Denis Mortlake. You should get his book, *Dust Heaps*, which I have just begun. Finely written; the theme is disillusion in post-war Europe. I will quote you the first paragraph, for it demonstrates what I mean about the decadent tendency.

"Disillusion is a luxury. One of those luxuries which the War has extended from a small class to a majority. Disillusion is a perverse gratification of the spirit, an artificial sterility of mind. Disillusion is the nakedness of those who can afford to be clothed."

XI

A COUPLE, passing along the gallery overlooking the main hall, paused behind Mary Graham.

"The girl in white. Down there, just passing the band now."

Mrs. Stanton's voice, replying: "That's the American that the eldest Graham boy's just married. . . . Yes . . . charming, isn't she? Very well off, I believe."

They moved on.

Mary looked down on the dancers. They were like flowers, scarlet and black, yellow and pink and blue, heaped together on the swirling flood of the music, revolving with dizzy buoyancy, quivering and flowing on the tides of rhythm. Her eye followed a golden head that had an incessant vivacity of its own, so that it caught one's attention.

She became aware of Geoffrey at her elbow. He sat down beside her.

"You aren't dancing?" she asked.

"Not this one." He too looked down on the dancers; she saw the direction of his glance.

"I hope Athene's enjoying it." He was serene and intent. "Clifford and she go well together." He was smiling in response to an eagerness discerned in his wife's

expression. He saw her nod and say something as she passed Denis and Patricia. Saw Clifford laugh.

"She's got a charming power of enjoyment and enthusiasm," Mary said.

"She means to miss nothing," he amplified without chagrin. "I'm to have only three dances this evening, because she's got to get every 'type' on to her programme. She's fairly 'doing' all the young and old men in the county. She's plied Mannie Stanton with questions about hunting; and enchanted old Lord Hannan by her interest in county cricket; and Carlos Brock has told her everything he knows about the breeding of Golden Labradors and wants to give her one." Geoffrey turned to his mother with quiet delight. "She's made a classification of men into 'brains' and 'brawn.' She says that I'm 'brains' and so is Denis, and that Clifford and Father and Mannie Stanton and Carlos Brock are 'brawn'."

Mary laughed. "It rather savors of the butcher's shop."

"It does, a little. But there's no butchery about Athene's criticisms and classifications. Mentally she treats her subjects in the humanest manner, rather like pressed flowers; finds them all entrancing."

Mary was responsive. "Yes, I like that about her, that she's appreciative. She never speaks unkindly. I like that," Mary repeated, "very much indeed." But she couldn't help thinking: "It might be better if she were a little more critical. She's almost, despite her observation and intelligence, almost gullible!" And yet, this was likable, this gullibility, because it was so bound up with a limitless power of being interested. From that angle, a valuable quality — a quality that could enrich, as well as endanger, its owner.

To Mary's surprise, Geoffrey voiced her reservation.

"Of course, she's got no power of elimination," he

said. "It's all grist to her mill. Possibly that's right. One's too inclined the other way."

He seemed to Mary, with regard to his wife, to oscillate between adoration and a nervous discernment; to give himself up at times to a wonderfully happy acceptance of her being his wife, and to waken himself, at other times, to an acute sense of responsibility, as though he felt that the very fact of her having married him laid upon him an obligation deeply to understand as well as to honor and love her.

"I think she's happy here," he said. There was sufficient query in the pronouncement to make his mother realize an obscure need in him for reassurance.

"I imagine," Mary asserted, "that she's completely so."

"I don't mean that I think she isn't; but what I feel, in general, is that she isn't altogether so — so fathomable as you would conclude; I mean from her being so expressive. She," — he dwelt on the pronoun as though it were precious between his fingers,— "she has two layers of depths, as it were: the top layer, very wide and clear, and below that a layer that isn't — isn't fathomable."

A feeling of his mother's comprehension led him to the further statement that it sometimes seemed as though Athene had a reverse conception of her own depths — that she seemed to herself deepest where he found her most clear, and that on the other hand she assumed as simple, in herself, certain notions and views whose derivations utterly eluded his understanding.

He didn't instance, to illustrate the latter situation, her decision that they weren't, in consideration of her need of new experience and culture, to have any children for several years — a decision made with that light, unconscious arrogance which was, in regard to making arrangements, her natural manner, implying that whatever was

her wish was also quite obviously the duty of its executors. He didn't instance this, not merely from an instinctive reserve, but because the shock which her point of view had given him had, in its reverberations, awakened in him a consciousness of prejudice. He'd told himself that there was no reason, beyond animal instinct, that women should desire children and derivatively subject their minds and characters to the process of reproducing the race. Yet even when he'd readjusted his mind and faced what he told himself was the distorting sentimentality of his prejudice, he was still troubled, still queerly hurt by an instinctive protest. His mind could say so lucidly that she was right; yet his instinct doubted the whole exposition of his reason, and urged him that her attitude was artificial and falsely romantic — that his prejudice had some basic and essential origin, however crudely it might work out in conventional sentimentalizing about motherhood.

Mary, watching his expression, the sudden drawing down of his brows, the obliteration of his cheerfulness in shadow, wondered just what instances of Athene's conduct were in his mind.

"I expect," she said, "that you puzzle her sometimes."

He seemed to emerge from the obscurity of his thoughts.

"I think she just accepts me." The unconscious humility, the absence of all irony in his remark, showed his mother how far he was from being troubled by being "accepted," taken for granted; so that she asked herself whether he wasn't almost too "civilized" in his freedom from the demands of natural jealousy or vanity. She couldn't check the question: —

"But is that enough?"

"What?"

"Being — accepted?"

"More than I could have hoped or deserved."

His look betrayed to her that, whatever the immediate cause of his civilized state of mind might be, its ultimate strength, derived from an intensity and not from any deficiency of feeling, showed her his humility and sincerity as tokens of a passion which could make all criticisms incidental and irrelevant.

Now he was scanning the crowd below them. Now she observed his look of pleasure; and below she saw Athene and Clifford, detaching themselves from the dancers, hesitate at the far end of the hall and then, laughing, link arms and disappear into the supper room.

A moment later she saw Patricia and Denis. Even from this distance she could see that Patricia looked pale and harassed, and that Denis was pushing back his lock of hair with a half-conscious air of savagery. He seemed to make a remark to Patricia and then turn on his heel; and Mary saw Daffy Stanton waylay him and say something, looking up into his face. Patricia stood alone by the doors of the supper room, quite still, as though she'd forgotten her surroundings. And then someone, a tall young man, with a diffident, very youthful address and yet somehow kindly and protective, coming up to her — yes, Jeremy Ford, apparently asking her if she'd dance with him. And now Bobs and a partner coming out of the supper room; Bobs stopping at the sight of Jeremy, as he talked to Patricia, looking at Jeremy with her fair head held high, and yet with an expression on her short, determined features which had in it more appeal than purpose and more gentleness than pride.

Now Patricia was dancing with Jeremy. And now Bobs and her partner were absorbed in the throng, Bobs's head a yellow blob against her partner's scarlet coat — yellow and scarlet in the multicolored eddying below.

The band was playing a waltz.

"It's like a play."

Bobs spoke resentfully, and felt her voice and body tremble.

"Exactly like a play," she repeated. She was sitting on a sofa in the deserted card-room.

But Jeremy continued:—

"I've meant to say it—for some time. You've avoided me all the evening, Bobs—"

She knew that if she looked at him his expression would hurt her.

"This ought to be a conservatory, and I ought to be blushing."

Mechanically he took up an ash tray from one of the card tables and threw the ashes behind the ferns that filled the fireplace.

His voice caught at her nerves:—

"We were such awfully good friends; and then, I thought—"

"I should make a—rotten wife."

He was on the sofa beside her now. Still she averted her face.

"Bobs!"

She could n't speak.

"Bobs! I know—I know I 'm not in the least clever, or attractive, or anything. And you know I 'm not well off; only of course I hope to get on, and old Maltby 'll give me a helping hand. But of course, meanwhile, we should be pretty badly off. And I know you think I 'm awfully—stuffy in my ideas. I mean what you 've said about my being fearfully conventional and not a bit imaginative, and all that. . . . Only, Bobs—I do care for you—most frightfully."

"No," she said. "No, Jeremy, *don't!*"

He let go her hand.

She fought him unwillingly with the phraseology of her friends.

"It's probably just a physical attraction."

His agonized curtness stabbed her:—

"You're talking rot."

The music had stopped. They listened mechanically to the storm of clapping. Again the waltz, lilting and insidious. She hardened.

"You *would* choose an—an occasion like this!"

"I don't understand you."

His query fumbled at more than her mere words.

"Evening dress—all the—the paraphernalia of sentiment." Her voice shook. She would n't look at him.

He struggled to meet her on what he perceived as a plane of reasonableness.

"I s'pose you mean that I'm simply carried away for the moment. That you don't believe I'm really—"

"You're so damned romantic!" She spoke sharply; the clumsiness of his words had a sweetness that unnerved her.

He winced at her tone; he could n't reason; he reverted apologetically, yet with a kind of helpless persistence, to "I love you so frightfully."

"Proximity. Habit."

As if in denial of her implication, he got up and began to walk about the room, deliberately avoiding the sight of her. He halted by the mantelpiece.

"I'm sorry, Bobs dear. I mean, bothering you. I s'pose I ought to have—let it alone, or been much surer. You see, I—I let myself think—"

The tears stung her eyes. She saw him blurrily—his head bent, his foot kicking at the fender. Something absurd, dreadfully lovable, about his white tie, the white butterfly of a bow under his chin. And his red-brown hair cut so tidily for the occasion, like a little boy.

He gave a harder kick; the brass rail rattled.

"I thought you might —" He could n't trust his voice to say it in the assertive, reasonable tone he was trying to master.

She felt herself invaded and gripped by an element stronger than her decisions, clearer than her flickering doubts, sweeter and more violent than the altruism of her ambitions. Her resistance broke.

"Jeremy — Jeremy!"

"Bobs?"

His gaze was wondering, innocent, half frenzied, half mistrustful; it pierced her strangely.

"Jeremy — darling —"

He was on his knees beside her.

"Oh, Bobs dear!"

"Oh," she sobbed, "is n't it damnable! Yes, put your arms round me, darling. Is n't it — damnable — that I — can't help — loving you, Jeremy!"

Patricia was leaning forward on her elbows, staring down on the tablecloth.

"You *know* I can't love you. Denis dear, for the last time, I can never — never — never —"

The waiter hurried, obsequious.

"Fruit salad or meringue, miss? Fruit salad or meringue, sir?"

"Meringue, please."

"Fruit salad, please," and Denis was moved to comment that even in this they should disagree. Then he was silent, stormily wretched, blindly resentful. He saw how her fingers twirled the stem of her glass; intuitive fingers, the skin close over the beautiful, strong bones, the sculptor's broad thumb.

She raised her head.

"And it is n't true."

"What is n't?"

"That I could 'save' you, as you like to imply, and make you happy."

"And why?"

Facing one another, each strangely felt the enmity between them — an enmity that had never from the beginning been quite absent from their relation, that was as much unconsciously interwoven with his passion for her as with her pity for him; a spiritual antagonism which neither acknowledged and possibly only she suspected. Some mental interpretation of it came out in her words: —

"Because," she said, "in spite of all your realisms you 're not real. You are n't capable of — of being happy. You imagine that if I loved you you 'd be different, satisfied; but really you like being dissatisfied; you almost like your unhappiness. In spite of all your cynicism, you 're a romantic and a sentimentalist; in fact, you 're cynical just because you 're sentimental. You like an emotional situation; you 're rather feminine in that, and in other ways. I mean, you like to be the pivot of a situation; you feel yourself the pivot."

She could see how, despite his genuine wretchedness, he was interested by what she said.

"In fact," she concluded, "satisfaction would get on your nerves."

"I dare say you 're right. I don't know. Everything gets on one 's nerves. Everybody 's nerve-racking, or else boring. And even eternity seems a choice between boredom and torture."

"Oh, but, Denis, you pretend. It 's a pose, all this." Her gesture indicated the sullenness of his attitude. His small features, overshadowed by the heavy brow, expressed a conscious bitterness — the nostrils sharp, the pointed chin seeming to press up against the vain, short

upper lip; the lower lip, whose squareness and down-turned corners gave to the whole face its hint of petulance, pushed forward. Knowing that she watched him, he intensified his attitude, and despised himself for doing so, and fleetingly brooded on the complexity of his own egoism.

"You're just being Russian." Her smile sadly, tentatively, held out an apology. She didn't mean to or want to hurt him; on the contrary, she was trying, if he would only see it, to put things on a friendly, easier level.

He laughed suddenly, staring at her.

"Ah, there's your sister-in-law — with whom I at last have the privilege of dancing."

As they approached Athene, Patricia saw how he instinctively adjusted himself to his new audience; how his bitter, gusty manner subsided to an ironical gravity, responding partly to what he suspected was the girl's notion of him, as a writer, partly his own half-conscious desire to make a special kind of impression. And for a moment, as Patricia watched their greeting, the girl's face upturned to Denis's look, she had a sense that Denis was aware of her watching, and that his manner wasn't only for Athene, but for her also. She let herself be claimed by Carlos Brock, and, amiably murmuring, they too were swept into the moving throng, swirling, pausing, — Carlos Brock danced well, — swift and slow, violent and lazy, all the time throbbingly and inescapably rhythmical. Incessant, tingling, ridiculous rhythm — silly music, silly rhythm, jolting in your blood. Rhythmic poison, sillification of the senses.

"Yes," she said aloud, "I think it is called 'Moon Love.'"

Athene was mentally too simple and Denis — experimental.

"No — only Father and Geoffrey and Clifford. But the rest of us are driving to the meet. At Burton Hill, isn't it?"

Passing the band was like going through a cave of blaring hot sound. The little man with the saxophone dancing up and down like a marionette, a crippled marionette, his eyes popping in his head like glass beads. The fleshy man beating the drum, rolling about in his chair, singing, winking at the couples as they passed. The violinist — why were all such violinists white and dank and pathetic?

> "Who misses a few kisses,
> With no one to see but the moon?"

"Here's a refuge," Denis urged.

Two chairs invited them along the corridor to an oasis of palm, for on festive occasions Melbury Town Hall borrowed its plumage from the East, and was never so luxuriant with desert vegetation as on such Occidental ceremonies as hunt balls and mayoral inaugurations. In fact, the peculiar dominance of these plants, combined with the exuberance of paper chains, balloons, Union Jacks, and flags of lesser nations constellating the hall itself, had seemed to Athene so unaccountable, so childish or vulgar or barbaric — she could n't determine which — for the festivity of the kind of people who would, and, as she perceived, did attend a hunt ball, that she turned to Denis with a finally irrepressible "Why to goodness don't they get in some interior decorator to do up the place for — for these shows?"

"You criticize," he asked, "already?"

"Well, no; I don't criticize, but I do ask questions, and I ask you, 'Why? Why? Why?'" And her arms were flung out to indict the dingy red carpet under their

feet, the cheap dark-stained woodwork of the walls, and, down the vista of the corridor, the multicolored festoonery of the ballroom. "Is it always this way? Do the English county families always dance in — in places like this?"

"Indeed, no. Mostly they dance in night clubs on the Tottenham Court Road or Leicester Square. And it would take me far too long and use up all my best epigrams to explain to you that, as a matter of fact, when you think that this is an assemblage of county families you're committing a romantic error, and that two thirds of English 'country life' is now lived by Jews and Americans, who preserve this kind of — er — ritual, not because they aren't aware that it could all be done more picturesquely, but because doing things in the customary way instead of the best way gives them a specious feeling of tradition. For instance, Lady Rosenheim, whom you may now observe coming out of the ballroom on the arm of your excellent young brother-in-law, Clifford, obviously and rather marvelously expensive, has a quite perfect house in Mayfair and a really magnificent collection of French impressionists. But down here, so I'm told, she drives herself into Melbury in a pony cart and manufactures a great illusion out of old tweed and hobnailed brogues. She could have the Hunt Ball in her own manor, complete with paneling, candlelight, and so forth."

"Then why, for heaven's sake?"

"Tradition — in Melbury. Always has been here."

She hesitated. "Oh, well, if it really *is* tradition — "

"You accept it?"

She said quickly: "Now you'll think I'm just another of — of the Americans you were making fun of."

"Has no one told you the popular belief that the English make fun of whatever they admire most?"

"A very pretty compliment." She took it lightly, for she was already learning, as she believed, to take everything more lightly. Yet she yearned to pierce his ironical banter, to meet the writer in him, the thinker, the "real author," as she phrased it to herself, of *Dust Heaps*. She asked:—

"Then *do* you admire Americans?"

He replied with a faint air of affectation that he had always thought he hated them, giving her to understand how surprisingly she was responsible for his present doubt. "They've always," he remarked, "produced in me a tiresome sensation of—er—inferiority. I do not like their wealth, I deeply suspect their self-confidence, and I am roused to a kind of envious contempt for their assumption that the universe is potentially both simple and beautiful, when my own experience only confirms my belief that it is complex and ugly."

She wasn't sure whether to be outraged or amused. Again she had to remind herself that what she might at home have considered rudeness was probably a form of humor; and she noted that humor, which had always seemed to her a jester recognizable by cap and bells, had here a bewildering and elusive number of forms, cropping up, as it seemed, forever in a new guise or disguise, respecting neither place nor person and subject only to its own fugitive impulses.

"And if I tell you that I am typically American?" She challenged him, leaving it to him to take the challenge seriously or with ease.

He leaned a little toward her; he liked the tilt of her chin, the elegant poise of her neck and shoulders. One could paint a portrait of her in any of her positions and she would always give this impression of fastidiousness. Then he sat back and said lightly, yet without taking his eyes from her face:—

"I suppose one doesn't mind your Americanism because you're so perfectly beautiful."

She accepted the remark as his way of talking. That he should find her beautiful seemed natural; that he should say so in so trivial a tone, yet with such a deep and curious look, she had to explain to herself by a renewed reference to his being a writer. In answer, she emancipated her own manner and declared that, instead of listening to the analysis of her compatriots, — which, anyway, she told him, was general and unsubtle, — she was dying to ask him about his book. It was her turn to lean forward now, and as she did so he thought how delightful it must be for Geoffrey to be in love with her — "although," he reflected, "she probably dissipates her temperamental possibilities by being too actively intelligent."

"You've read it, then?" He was conscious that he could never quite control that little reflex jerk of pleasure, and took especial pains to seem detached and even annoyed by her remark.

"I'm just about halfway through it. I think it's wonderfully clever."

"But?" Touchily he imagined reservation in her tone.

"I didn't say 'but'."

"You thought it, though."

From under her lashes he caught a flash of faint, sweet mockery.

"You understand my thoughts better than I do, Mr. Mortlake. I was going to tell you I've been absolutely absorbed in it. The characterization is great: I know that young man and his family as if I'd lived with them."

"But you don't like it, all the same. I know you don't." He affected an amused detachment, but she could feel how he hung on her answer.

"Well," she gave out a lovely frankness, "if you must have it — it tears me both ways. I mean I like it so enormously, and all the same, just because it's so clever and wonderfully written, it — the motif of it depresses me. It seems to me terrible that you should feel that way. After all, Mr. Mortlake, things can't be so bad as you paint them. So — bitter, so — hopeless. It strikes at one's whole idea of human nature."

As she spoke, he saw that she was without guile and full of fervor; that she was sure in her point of view, and that the quality he would have liked to dismiss as mere racial "looking on the bright side" was reënforced by a kind of Puritanism that made her optimism as much a moral duty as a mental tendency. "It isn't *right*," she asserted, "to have such a point of view. It seems to me it isn't right to yourself or to your public."

She was a little breathless, a little conscious of having been carried away by an unexpectedly strong current in her own personality. It came over her that she'd been, perhaps rather presumptuously, flying in the face of art, as typified by this young writer's ironical and restless countenance; so she broke off, to add, on an unaccustomed note of apology, that of course she might have misunderstood his purpose.

"But if I tell you that I had no purpose? And that I don't consider that art should?"

She was elated by a sense that the matter between them was at last clear and serious.

"Yes, of course, that's been discussed so often, hasn't it? Whether art — "

"Exactly," he interrupted briskly.

She could feel his impulse to escape to a plane of flippancy, and fairly caught him in flight with an assertion that, in her opinion, although art need not have exactly a moral purpose, all great art must have a bias

toward good, just as, she proclaimed, all truly great nations must have that bias.

"False analogy."

She took the comment and the rudeness of its expression with a smile that made him feel brutish. "I don't think so. Anyway, what I'm getting at is that art is an influence over public opinion, and therefore—"

"But your argument is sociological, not artistic."

Again she ignored his contradiction, and he realized that she would always ignore whatever was irrelevant to her own ideas or actions, and would always assume that irrelevance to be absolute.

"What I mean *is,* Mr. Mortlake—"

He saw Patricia and Jeremy Ford coming out of the ballroom. Even while he oddly flinched at the sight, his vision contrasted the two women: Athene's strong, lovely fragility, her openness, her conceit, her paradoxical flavor of luxury and primness, her quality of being supremely feminine yet hardly female. Patricia's reserve—of what? Humor? Passion? Melancholy? The boyish dignity of her tall, broad-shouldered, narrow-waisted body, the uncertain, tantalizing beauty of her face!

"What I mean *is,* Mr. Mortlake, that you have a responsibility toward your public, to give them a message of beauty." She cited poets and Old Masters as though they were her show pupils.

Denis's brows went up with a nervous jerk:—

> "And almost thence my nature is subdued
> To what it works in . . .
> Pity me then and wish—"

"Oh, but I do wish, you were 'renewed.' That's just what I do wish!"

He was startled by her aptness, amused by her fervid

illogicality, but most essentially touched by the warmth, the admiration, of her tone.

"But what *I* mean is that I don't want or mean to write for the public, or give them any message they may want. My whole idea in writing . . . " And now he found himself fatally, exquisitely, yielding to a desire that more and more overcame him, the desire to confide in her; to try to make her understand the tortuous, tortured nature of his being; to make her feel for him and with him what Patricia wouldn't feel; to possess her sympathies; to breathe the fragrance of her admiration; to solace himself in her bright, limpid coolness, and, even as he did so, to trouble and awaken that very clarity where he sought peace.

He could feel now, as he spoke, how his words, his expression, took a hold upon her. He hated himself.

"I think," he heard the slow-dropping richness of his own sentences, "that perhaps — you can understand."

She tasted the words, wide-eyed. His belief in her understanding moved her as no tribute to her beauty could have done. It seemed to her that he had suddenly — perhaps because he felt in her some fundamental response, some affinity — thrown off his mask of cynicism.

"It seems to me," she said, "that you feel the world is bitter because you are unhappy, and you have to express your unhappiness in your art."

They were crashed in upon by the sound of "John Peel."

"Oh, damn!" Denis bit his lip. "That's the last dance — the galop," he added wryly.

Geoffrey hurried toward them, smiling, breathless.

"I've been looking for you everywhere, darling."

She rose, delighted.

"Dearest, I'm terribly sorry you had a bother to find

me. Mr. Mortlake has been so very interesting." She looked up at him gratefully. "We must go on with our talk another time, Mr. Mortlake." She put her hand on Geoffrey's arm, urged him toward the ballroom. "Come on then, darling," and her gayety and anticipation were in her voice.

Locked together, they joined the pelting, rollicking throng; she felt herself hurled along by its steadily increasing impetus — pink coats, glistening faces, girls with their hair flying back from vivid cheeks, old men, cherubic youths, exquisite women, reckless dowagers, all galloping faster and faster round and round the hall, round and round, on and on, laughing, panting, perspiring. She caught sight of Sir Charles, his face scarlet as his coat, stampeding along with Mrs. Stanton; Bobs and Jeremy Ford thudding past in a state of wild exhilaration. Snatches of singing, shouts, and laughter rising to the waving heaven of balloons and paper chains. The singing growing louder and louder, the whole stampede joining in: —

"D' ye ken John Peel
And his coat so gay!
D' ye ken John Peel
At the break of day!
D' ye ken John Peel
When he 's far, far away
With his hounds and his horn
In the morning!"

Geoffrey, laughing, shouting, holding her hard and close, looking down at her with dark, sparkling merriment: —

"Peel's view halloa
Would waken the dead,
And the fox from his lair
In the morning!"

XII

MARY saw them, all of them, coming across the lawn. They were lit by the sunset, and even at this distance she could see how their cheeks were red and their eyes bright from their day in the open air. She could see how they talked and laughed together: Athene in the centre in an absurd, small green hat; Bobs, Patricia, Denis with a blue-and-orange Fair Isle muffler wound about his neck, one tasseled end flying in the wind; Clifford and Geoffrey swaggering a little in their black coats and splashed white breeches.

Sitting in the house watching their return, she had an extraordinary feeling of isolation, as if the glass of the window were an inviolable wall, and the distance between her and them — between her and her children, and the other two — an infinity; as if, however certainly and gayly they came toward her, they 'd never reach her; that their cries of greeting would be carried off by the wind, and her answers, her calling to them, break against the window, and the room where she sat be haunted by the echoes of her broken words.

The turf under their feet had a strange brilliance, intensifying their sudden and poignant strangeness. The trees, the elms whose high branches were clotted with rooks' nests, the strong dark silver nakedness of the beeches, the hobgoblin assembly down in the orchard, the trees that she 'd loved and been young with and lived with through the seasons and grown old with — the trees were mysteriously 'theirs' now. In the distance the rolling wintry uplands — her view that she 'd grown to love — lay under a tide of light, the patchwork red-and-green-and-purple fields flooded over with a tawny radiance. Her view was their background.

She caught her breath. Their vigorous strolling, their muddy boots, — she could see the mud caked to Patricia's brogues, — their dearness and remoteness hurt her. Always the window between them, and herself sitting and watching them. Mentally, with an odd sense of panic, she conjured them, crystallized them, into a picture, just as they were now. She would keep them, their vitality, petrified in her vision: Bobs's hair eternally a gilt slash across her cheek; the proud provocative bend of Patricia's head as she answered Geoffrey; Denis with his shoulders high, his hands in his pockets. All so diversely yet wonderfully, palpably young.

How queer, how dazzling, youth was! How queer that they should quite unconsciously possess it, as they possessed the earth under their feet and the glow of the sunset and the frosty air deliciously stinging their nostrils! As she herself had possessed it —

For one grew old without knowing it. Thirty, forty, fifty. And all the time it seemed as if youth must be part of yourself, *was* part of yourself; as if you weren't and couldn't be changing, because you were still so much yourself. Only other people changed. But for you the signs, thirty, forty, fifty, were mere conventions, part of a game. Thirty, forty, fifty; and "twenty" was thirty years ago, and childhood forty years past, and half a century was spanned and lived.

They crossed the drive. They were going round to the back door, because of their muddy boots.

But it was difficult, when one remembered, thought about it, to be young. A terrible freedom, a terrifying and yet exhilarating sense of importance to yourself, to the world. What you did was important; what you thought and what people thought of you mattered so much. Perhaps it was easier to be old, to be bound —

pleasantly bound — by the long consequences of one's beginnings: to be tugged at, heart and brain and body, by innumerable filaments of responsibility, tied down by the Lilliputian mesh of one's affections.

She heard their voices in the hall, going upstairs.

The door opening. Bobs standing in the doorway, her gray eyes very bright.

"Well, darling, did you have a good day?"

"Heavenly." She came in and closed the door, and pattered across to the fireplace in her stockinged feet. "We followed the hunt in the car to Buckley, and then on foot right across the hill near Deancote, past Helsbury and down to the woods near Caldecott Hollow. Then we had lunch, sitting in a ditch, and the fox passed us, within twenty-five feet, I should say. And when the hunt passed about ten minutes later Denis went quite dippy; he meant to be funny, and I suppose it *was,* rather. He stood up on a stile and shouted, 'Shame on this butchery! Down with this torment of innocent beasts! Long live the Royal Society for Prevention of Cruelty to Animals!' and Clifford passed quite near him, and was absolutely furious, and pretended he didn't see any of us. And Geoffrey rode past and laughed, and Athene thought Denis was being serious, and was frightfully thrilled and took me by the arm and said she felt it was a fearfully courageous thing to do, to stand up for one's convictions in the face of convention like that; and I said I agreed, but that in this case Denis was only pulling their legs; but she didn't seem to take that in. And Jeremy —" Bobs hesitated, looking up quickly, but she could only see that her mother was amused, listening with a quizzical air which didn't change as she asked whether Jeremy, then, had been with them, and not riding.

Bobs nodded. "Yes, and he thought it funny too."

She elaborately held out both her hands to the fire. "I think that was rather nice of him. Don't you, Mummie? I mean, considering how conventional he is."

She paid the tribute to her idea of him, though it crossed her mind that in his present mood Jeremy was likely to find anything, that wasn't gloriously serious, ravishingly funny. At intervals through the day he'd been seized by fits of madcap merriment, from the moment when she'd caught sight of him coming toward her at the meet, when he seized her two hands and made her come into the Brocks's place and drink the future in cherry brandy, to the time, half an hour ago, when he'd left them at the gates, and, looking back, she'd seen him still watching her with an adoring gravity.

Mary agreed that it was nice of him, and waited.

There was a silence. Then Bobs said:—

"I'm going to marry Jeremy, Mummie."

There was a hint of defiance in her tone, not so much to her mother as to some difficult element in her own judgment.

"We—I,—" her direct look was veiled, her tone softened,—"we decided last night." (That waltz. The deserted card-room. Funny white bow under his chin. His feverish, clumsy embraces.)

So *that* was it, Mary thought. She'd wondered. She found that she couldn't properly take it in. She said: "I'm glad, darling." There didn't seem to be any words yet, when it still seemed so queer. Bobs married! She added, wondering if her words were unjustifiable, impudent, "I'm glad—if you love him."

But the notion of impudence didn't appear to cross Bobs's mind. She dealt with the question on its merits.

"I do love him, or I wouldn't be doing it. I feel I've got to marry him, because I love him."

Mary said, "I like him, darling. I think he'll make you happy."

She spoke warmly, but sat still. She knew that Bobs was afraid she might kiss her.

"I hadn't considered it quite from the angle of happiness. I think it's a played-out idea that people can make each other happy. It's more a matter of luck. Some people grow happily together, and others just seem to tangle each other up. I—I don't know at all how suitable he is."

Mary wondered what secret reservations lay behind Bobs's words. The child was so determined to be logical, even in love.

"But if you don't think—"

"From a reasonable point of view I feel I ought to marry a man who shares my political views and who has the same intellectual outlook. Jeremy is intelligent, but of course he isn't clever. I am fairly clever, and I suppose with an intellectual husband I should—well, learn more, and do more perhaps—I mean politically and so forth. On the other hand, it doesn't seem to be any guarantee to settle down with someone because he likes Turgenev's novels as much as you do. That kind of a basis is always collapsing, because, after all, heaps of men and women like Turgenev who don't really care for each other, and when they agree about the Russians it makes them both feel clever for the time being; but probably that's all there is to it. What I feel, Mummie," Bobs stood up now in front of the fire and began, in the manner of her father, to warm her coat tails, "is that if I marry, as I'm going to, because I'm—well, so hopelessly in love, there's probably quite a chance of its being a success. I thought it all over last night and this morning while I was dressing, but I waited to tell you till I'd seen Jeremy again. You

see, Mummie, quite apart from the physical attraction Jeremy and I feel toward each other, he is extremely affectionate, and I'm certain that makes a difference, and I believe I could feel affectionate toward him too."

Mary wasn't sure whether she wanted to laugh or cry; she had an impulse to pick Bobs up in her arms and kiss her and tell her not to be a goose.

"And do you say all this to Jeremy?"

Bobs flushed. "No—not exactly. I mean, that's part of his being conventional: he wouldn't like it." What she didn't admit to her mother, and scarcely to herself, was that when she was with Jeremy she didn't really care about anything—except Jeremy.

"I only say it to you," she went on frankly, "because I want to justify myself."

She rose.

Mary gave her a laughing, tremulous look. "My dear baby, d'you know, I'm so passée and romantic in my notions that I don't really think a love match needs much justification."

Bobs paused at the door.

"Was yours?" she demanded.

"My—?"

"Was yours a love match?"

"Yes."

"And what's your justification now?" Bobs had never considered her parents' marriage before. Why had they done it? What had drawn them together, made Mummie leave her fascinating, indulgent, brilliant father, give up her position as his hostess and companion? What, exactly, had Mummie felt for the young Charles Graham? One couldn't imagine father—like Clifford, perhaps.

"I should say my justification was—you. All of you, I mean."

"Oh — children."

"Yes, children — and other things, of course. But perhaps most of all, children."

Bobs considered. "It seems to me they're more a result than a justification."

Mary got up and switched on the lamp on the bureau. "Perhaps," she spoke half to herself, "perhaps one clings to them, and the idea of them, too much. But then, can't one judge by results?" She almost pleaded.

"Biologically; but not psychologically. In regard to a marriage, the children may be excellent and the marriage a bore."

"But —" It was so funny to be saying these things to Bobs, Bobs standing there so sure of herself, — or, after all, not so sure? — her fair childish head turned sedately toward the lamplight. "But I think the children of people who love each other are much nicer." The words sounded silly, perhaps, but she felt and knew their truth.

"Nicer? You mean prettier?"

She sat down at the bureau and began unconsciously to draw faces on the blotting paper. She always did these same faces — profiles, or profiles *perdus*, smooth, adolescent little profiles with long eyelashes. All her blotters were covered with them.

"No." Her black glance flickered up, and Bobs had a momentary misgiving that she was being laughed at. "Nicer, in the proper sense of the word, if you like. Finer, more sensitive, more spirit and less clay."

"Which all comes back," Bobs remarked, "to justifying my marrying Jeremy."

"If," Mary glanced at her daughter now with a satirical gentleness, "if you really *must* justify."

When Bobs had gone out, Mary wondered whether she'd hurt her. For there were two beings in Bobs —

the efficient, critical, argumentative young woman, and the warm-hearted, dreamy little girl. You never knew, quite, which of them your words would reach. But what did anyway seem to emerge from the situation was that it was the little girl, not the young citizen, who wanted to marry Jeremy.

And Mary asked herself which of the two would finally live with him.

XIII

Bobs found her father in the hall. He had just come in, and was rocking to and fro on the chair by the fire, struggling with his left boot. He said:—

"Damn it, Bobs, catch hold of this boot and pull!"

She began to wrench and tug, while he held on to the arms of the chair, swearing and breathing heavily.

"Cramp," he muttered, and swore again, his complexion the color of teakwood. The boot came off suddenly, so that Bobs staggered and nearly fell backward. He leaned down and rubbed his instep.

"Been tryin' to get these blessed boots off for ten minutes. Where's Clifford? He might have given a hand. Or Geoffrey? Why couldn't they ride home with me instead of gettin' Chidley to ride their horses back? Can't even ride their own horses home. I suppose they drove back in the car with you?"

"Yes."

Sir Charles clumped his boots to one side of the fireplace and rang for a whiskey and soda.

"All you young people are gettin' too luxurious. That's what's the matter with the world to-day. In my time—"

He grunted when the tray was brought in.

"Good whiskey this! You can't get better. The

whole standard is ridiculous." Holding the glass, he let himself down again into the armchair. The firelight made orange surfaces and sherry-colored shadows on his coat; the glass glittered like a topaz in his big knotted hand. A glow of well-being pervaded him. His eye fell on the bowl of chrysanthemums on the tall-boy; he liked chrysanthemums, jolly-looking flowers with plenty of color to them. He always told Mary he liked them. Liked roses best, of course; you could n't beat a rose, especially those big roses. Used to send them to Mary.

Bobs stood on the hearth, looking down at him.

"Father, I 'm going to marry Jeremy Ford."

"Well, by Jove! *Are* you? Jeremy Ford. Well!" He stared at her, and she could see that, although astounded, he was pleased. But he paid lip service — and especially in moments of pleasure — to a tradition of not giving yourself away.

"So this is the first I hear of it. Springin' it on me like this. Well, by Jove! Of course he 's a decent young fellow, Ford. Yes, I must say I like him. Still, I don't see what you 're goin' to live on."

"Jeremy has four hundred a year. And he says Mr. Maltby 's promised him a rise soon. And then, when I 'm twenty-one, there 'll be the hundred pounds that grandfather left me — and," she continued to eye her parent with disarming candor, "of course, Father, I count on you to keep on my allowance of a hundred and fifty."

He looked her up and down. He admired her in spite of her nonsensical radical notions. And young Ford was a sensible fellow who 'd probably cure her of them; marriage 'd cure her of them. Girls ought to marry. Patricia 'd have been better — Yes, he rather liked the idea.

"So you count on me," he chuckled; and he could n't resist: "So you count on your old capitalist of a father, eh?"

He got up and put his arm round her shoulder. Somehow his chuckling pleasure was so comforting — and it would be useless anyway, with Father, to go into subtleties of reasons and justifications — that she could n't resent his words.

"So," he grunted, "all 's fair in love, eh? Even capitalism?"

And suddenly she threw her arms round his neck and hugged him.

XIV

Clifford was pink and hilarious after his hot bath. He flung his muddy breeches out on to the landing and began to dress for dinner. He was wondering whether it would amuse Athene to come over to Lady Rosenheim's to luncheon to-morrow. Lady Rosenheim had said, "Do bring any of the others." He rather liked Lady Rosenheim. He reflected that he rather liked older women — they seemed to take more trouble to be amusing. And her clothes were frightfully good. And had she really meant it when she said, "not going with the Stantons? Then you must certainly join our party to Wengen." Rather an amusing crowd. It would probably be great fun, all "done" very well; and, if she meant it, she obviously meant to — to stand the expenses.

He turned a drawer upside down to find a pair of evening socks. He found one; finally he found the other in his collar box. The Rosenheim boy had been at Eton with him; not a bad fellow at all. Marvelous tennis player.

He was brushing his hair when Bobs came in and told him that she was going to marry Jeremy Ford.

His eyes grew round.

"By Jove! Why — Jeremy Ford! You!" He stood there with his arms raised, holding his brushes to his head.

"Well, I'm —"

"What's so odd?" said Bobs irritably.

"But it's so — so comic, after all you've said."

"What?"

"Well — about Jeremy." He shook his head. There was no end to Bobs's queerness. And he couldn't, though he jibbed at the notion of disloyalty, quite help wondering how Jeremy would manage — when he had to live with Bobs. "Well," he came out with, after prolonged reflection, while Bobs picked up his nail scissors and, standing before the cheval glass, began vaguely to snip at her fringe, "well, what I can't make out, considering how awfully different your views are and all that, is what on earth makes you want to."

Bobs snipped off nearly half an inch above her right eyebrow.

"The life force, I suppose."

"What on earth d'you mean, 'life force'? Sounds like a new cereal."

She snipped above the left eyebrow.

"Of course — you don't read Shaw. I think he has some interesting ideas, though he is old-fashioned. The life force is the primal instinct that makes the human species pair off."

It was Clifford's turn to be superior.

"Life force be damned," he said.

XV

It appeared to Athene absurd that Geoffrey should go up to London. She wanted him to come over with her and Clifford to Lady Rosenheim's. Even, she said, if Patricia *was* going up, she could have gone up alone; and if she, Athene, wanted him to stay . . .

"There is n't any reason why you should go to-day. You could go to-morrow just as well."

"My dear, I've got to go up and arrange about my lectures for the term. And to-morrow I'm playing golf all day with Carlos Brock and two other men."

"But you told me the term did n't begin until the twentieth."

They were in the comfortable, down-at-heels library, and Athene was already dressed to what she considered the tone of a country luncheon party, a deliberately casual smartness: a pair of brogues that were n't too new, one row of pearls, an unassertive hat, partly Parisian, partly individual, verging on the countrified, that proclaimed its very carelessness to be a matter of subtlety.

Geoffrey wondered what, behind this light and quite pleasant impatience, she was really feeling. But he merely reiterated that it was, nevertheless, to-day that he must go up and make the arrangements. She tapped her toe on the floor, and remarked with beautiful distinctness that she really wanted him to stay.

"I'm afraid, darling, that it's impossible." He spoke without the least hint of assertion; he might indeed, she reflected, have been saying, "Then of course I'll stay." Her hazel eyes were bent on him with a faint, charming dismay.

"I did n't realize it was so — important." Her delivery let him understand that she did n't now and probably never would realize.

He gave her one of his long, dark glances that always baffled, yet always strangely moved her. He said lightly: —

"Denis would tell you that nothing was important, and Bobs would tell you that everything was."

She broke in, almost before she realized she was doing so: —

"Denis is coming too, to-day," and felt herself grow hot — the kind of challenge, she told herself, that might have been flung out by any Broadway flapper. And when he tilted up her face to his and demanded, kissing her lips, whether she would n't then have a sufficient bodyguard, she was dumb with the sense that he had n't even dimly imagined any implication in her words.

And, still cupping her face in his hands, he asked her whether she did n't realize how he hated leaving her.

"Then — Why?" Her whisper died under his kiss.

"Dearest, lovely sweetheart, ordinary life has got to go on."

She gave in; she let him go, surrounding his departure, as he and Patricia packed into the car, with a rare atmosphere of permission. She sped him beamingly and serenely. But when she turned back from the porch into the house she was troubled. She felt indefinitely wronged. And "golf all day to-morrow"!

She 'd wanted him to stay — and he had n't. That was clear to her. In some way he 'd won. But what was n't clear to her, what haunted her as a half-enchanting fear, was the insistence of her desire for his company. She wondered at an inexplicable disorder in her feelings, which had always been so exquisitely pigeonholed and tabulated and inventoried. The disorder pained her, and, defensively, she fixed her mind on what she chose to think of as Geoffrey's absence of consideration.

XVI

The village of Sezindean lay in a hollow, while the manor of Sezindean crested a soft rise of hillside, enjoying that dual privilege of a gentleman's habitation —a view and a solidity against climate.

Built by a certain Sir Thomas Fleete in the reign of Queen Elizabeth, it was bought in 1901 from Sir Merrick Fleete by Sir Philip Rosenheim — an incident in so much other giving-up and taking-over, caused by that lengthy transfusion of vitality from Agriculture to Commerce. Sir Philip's sensibility was aware that what time had made perfect and money had bought could not and should not — for he had an Oriental sense of the sacred — be "improved" by money; and it was only by shrubberied hard tennis courts and by the transformation of powder closets into bathrooms that he allowed Lady Rosenheim to provoke the ghosts for whose bodies tennis had been a pastime and bathing a superfluity. In their possession the gabled loveliness of the house remained inviolate, seeming rather, after the manner of old houses, to possess its owners, and as the years passed, to imbue their spirits with something of its own tranquillity. And if, in antithesis to her family, Lady Rosenheim seemed to be impervious to any such quiet influence, the explanation might have been found in her friends' dictum that "Helen was so indefatigable"; or in her enemies' accusation of "climbing" — her activity making her, as it were, immune from the very atmosphere she worked in.

The perfection of Sezindean, its honeyed stonework, the lawns and cedars, the iron-studded portals, the claret-black paneling in the hall, woke in Athene partly an inevitable admiration, partly, and more deeply, the perception that it was just this, an air of the picturesque,

a redolence of tradition, — qualities comprised in her term, "Old World," — that she'd originally expected. This was how she'd first envisaged Geoffrey's home: just such oak beams and great fireplaces, such brocade hangings and oak settles and pewter and high-backed chairs, and the garden glimpsed through latticed windows. This, she would have said, was the very heart of England.

Lady Rosenheim came forward, two spaniels at her heels.

"So delighted, Mrs. Graham."

The fragrance of potpourri, the aroma of old books, a vista of a long, brown library. A murmur of appreciation from Denis. Clifford assenting to the suggestion of a cocktail. Lady Rosenheim, masterful in a thick woolen sweater, pulling a bell rope. She nodded in answer to Athene's query.

"Yes, a genuine Peter Lely. She was the wife of Sir Alexander Fleete, the third baronet. She died of smallpox when she was twenty-eight."

The arras was pushed aside at the further end of the library.

"My son and daughter — Veronique — Alfred."

They appeared male and female, positive and negative, variations on a theme of narrow bodies, oval, sombre faces, and slanting gray-blue eyes. Their black cropped hair showed off the smallness of their ears and the shapeliness of their heads; their proportions made them seem taller than they actually were; both were dressed in gray and wore tennis shoes. Their difference seemed less in their sex than in their souls. The girl looked sleepy to the verge of stupidity, the boy so wakeful that his body seemed a fragile vessel for his vitality.

They had been playing tennis. You would n't have

supposed, Athene thought, that the girl could move fast enough, but she heard the boy telling Clifford that Veronique had put up a pretty stiff game.

Daffy Stanton arrived. Denis remarked to Athene that Daffy usually looked conspicuous, but beside Veronique she simply looked vulgar.

"The Stantons," he added, "like many middle-class people in every nation, have an anti-Semitic bias. Daffy made some comments to me about the Rosenheims the other night at the Hunt Ball. They don't like to see their own defects, materialisms and snobbery and petty aggressiveness, reflected on a large and aquiline scale, so to speak, which is what the baser Hebrew does for them. And what they find even more suspect are the qualities like artistic sensibility and personal fastidiousness and intellectual zest, that they don't pretend to compete in. Their prejudice is really based on a mediæval attitude toward usury, and they neglect to realize that the whole of the modern business world is founded upon that principle. I don't mean"—he glanced to where Mrs. Stanton was bending a bovine countenance on Alfred Rosenheim—"that they *know* their prejudice has that foundation. They think they are only despising money, and their way of expressing that feeling is to accept hospitality and mentally patronize its honors. There's nothing"—he followed Athene's look as Daffy took possession of Clifford and Veronique let him go without a flicker on the lacquered calm of her expression—"there's nothing the real middle-class takes to like a race prejudice—French, Germans, Jews; it gives them a feeling of being exclusive. There's nothing the mediocre human being with a standardized mind likes so much as the notion of being exclusive."

"May I introduce my husband—Mrs. Geoffrey Graham, Mr. Denis Mortlake."

Sir Philip's soft, quick little smile. Impossible, Athene thought, to imagine him a financier, like her father. The light fine build of his son and daughter, an expression blended of austerity and extraordinary mental subtlety, the topaz heavy-lidded eyes of an eagle. Clifford had told her that Sir Philip could speak eight languages, and also translated Chinese poetry.

She sat next to him at luncheon. She asked him about his travels in the East, told him her father had been there. He asked her father's name. Carlton Reid? Yes, he remembered quite well meeting him in New York. Why, only last week the name had come up, as the director of a certain company.

She wondered if she imagined that Sir Philip stopped short, looked curiously at her, almost as if he were embarrassed. He began talking about China. She must have imagined . . .

His conversation was varied, allusive, extraordinarily delightful. Queer to think of him married to Lady Rosenheim. Athene was interested by the delicate, complicated quality of his mind — the infinitely fine shades. He seemed to be all depths and his wife all surface — a polished, highly colored surface. Athene told herself that they were "types."

His hands fascinated her: broad palms and tapering fingers that seemed to have an electrical sensibility of their own, the first finger curving at the tip toward the middle finger — a sign, she remembered her mother telling her, of Hebrew descent. Her mother hated Jews as a matter of course. There were three million Jews in America, but you only "knew" them if they happened to be artists. Her father believed the Jews were a greater problem than the color problem. She tried to imagine him talking to Sir Philip Rosenheim.

On the other side of the large round table Lady Ros-

enheim was entertaining a clergyman whom Athene had recognized as Mr. Summerbee. Clifford seemed embarrassed between Daffy's chatter and Veronique's impassivity. Once Athene observed his glance fixed on the latter with an air of cherubic wonder.

Denis bore with Mrs. Stanton's voluble hauteur on the subject of relationships between people of county families. The implication was that, though she might lunch with the Rosenheims, her real acquaintance was of another circle. When, halfway through luncheon, he realized that she was trying to place him, — "Mortlake — not any relation to the Lincolnshire Mortlakes?" — he replied that as a matter of fact his father's real name was Hagenbeck, and he had married a half-caste woman from a cabaret in Rio de Janeiro. Mrs. Stanton then turned her attention to a youth with a title and a cut on his chin, whose sad glances were palpably engaged with Veronique. When she discovered his name it struck her that he might do for Daffy.

Sir Philip asked: —

"And are you full of impressions of your new life, Mrs. Graham?" The topaz eyes blinked and were still.

"My impressions are getting pretty well like a lot of photographs taken on the same negative, Sir Philip. I don't seem to be able to get a really definite view, to analyze. . . ."

Again his soft, quick smile.

"Nearly forty years ago I came to England to work in the bank of an uncle of mine. Queen Victoria had n't yet had her first Jubilee, and Lord Salisbury was Prime Minister. Twenty-five years ago I bought one of the loveliest houses in this part of the country, which has always seemed to me one of the most exquisite and intimate stretches in England. I think I have met almost every kind of Englishman. I have been in busi-

ness, and I have seen a certain amount of social and intellectual and political life here. I've met the stupid English, and the brilliant English, and the well-bred, and the vulgar. I've read and reread English literature, classical and modern, and I know it as few Englishmen know it, so that it has become like this house to me, always more full of charm and more beautiful each time I come back to it. Something that you can call the English spirit or the English character has captured me so completely that I could never be content now to live in any other country. I can see all the faults," — the lids narrowed down over the tawny eyes,— "I see with the French that in many things the English are hypocritical. I see with the Germans that they indulge in somewhat insufferable airs of God-given superiority, a trait they share, I think, with your countrymen. I see, with the Americans, that the English are inclined to look upon their own inefficiencies as a charming foible; they mistrust the industrious nature of the German, and the 'go' and zest of the American. And yet when I begin to ask myself why I am enthralled as I am and what makes this rain-ridden country so attractive," — his hands fluttered and fell again, — "I'm no nearer understanding it than you are. Like you, I don't seem to be able to get a really definite view. It's like" — his look seemed to wander in a vista of his own mind — "being in love. You don't analyze,

> "But she makes hungry
> Where most she satisfies."

That's what one feels, what I feel, anyway." He hesitated, startling her with the penetration of his glance. "I wonder," he said, "if you will."

"Fall in love — with England, Sir Philip?"

"Yes."

"I guess I've been in love with her before ever I came here."

"Ah," he ventured, "isn't that dangerous, Mrs. Graham? Weren't you perhaps in love with your idea, your imagined England? And wasn't it that which made you say to me, when we were first talking, before luncheon, that at least '*this* is like England,' when, as a matter of fact, it isn't?"

"But can't I keep my ideal, Sir Philip?"

"When you love," he queried, and it struck her that his tones had the effect of coming from a distance, "do you need an ideal?"

"Surely, most of all!" She had high and unanswerable convictions on the question of idealism and love.

"Surely an ideal is merely a confusing image, blurring the real image."

She didn't answer; she had a faint sense of mental shock. And he continued:—

"And what you love must be the reality, whether it's a person or a country. Idealism is so apt to be the rock on which both marriage and citizenship founder—expecting and even imagining perfection, instead of caring for the reality."

"But mustn't you want the reality to be perfect, Sir Philip? Isn't it right to want it to be?" She was thinking of Geoffrey.

"Love isn't a drawing-room comedy, Mrs. Graham, and England isn't an historical pageant."

"I see," she came out with after a pause. "You mean it's all much more subtle."

"I suppose I mean partly that—yes." She wondered why he smiled.

"And you mean," she earnestly continued, "that you can miss the real value by—by expecting too much of an imaginary value?"

He said softly: "My dear lady, you take my platitudes altogether too much *au sérieux.*"

But as they rose to go and have coffee in the hall, she found herself reflecting on his remarks. His view of idealism was curious, and yet it seemed to tally with a remark of Geoffrey's to the effect that "idealism was so apt to be eyewash."

Veronique turned on the gramophone and then sat down on the floor as if she were too lazy to return to the more sociable end of the hall. Daffy Stanton and Alfred Rosenheim began to dance. Clifford dared to ask Veronique, who nodded and got up with alacrity. Mr. Summerbee remarked to Lady Rosenheim that there was nothing like dancing for keeping you warm in cold weather, while Mrs. Stanton so enveloped the titled young man with her brooding amiability that he perforce asked her to dance. Watching their progress, Athene reflected that no American woman of Mrs. Stanton's age and status would be so lamentably overdressed.

"Do you feel like dancing?" Denis was at her side. "If you won't dance with me, I feel it in my bones that our hostess will. The excellent Mr. Summerbee is only waiting to pursue our host into the study and demand a subscription for a Half-Wits' Club or a Rustic Purity League."

She laughed. "Come along, then, and I'll save you."

When they were dancing, he said:—

"You have a peculiar effect upon me."

She glanced up to meet his brooding, questioning look, and demanded with a deliberate lightness:—

"How do I affect you?"

"As a stimulant." His manner of reply had a sardonic flavor. "Insidious — delightful — fatal!"

Though she took the words with a laugh, they gave her pleasure. She couldn't help divining truth beneath

his manner, and the notion of stimulating — for which she mentally substituted "inspiring" — a creative mind such as his was radiant to her. She cherished the suggestion of herself as an influence, reflecting too that the morning's episode with Geoffrey had shown up how little he, at any rate, needed and even heeded her influence.

They drove back from Sezindean almost without speaking. Lady Rosenheim's farewells had ended on a final reminder to Clifford that she would count upon him the following week for Wengen; and, sitting at the wheel, he mused upon the prospect, mentally inspecting his wardrobe; buying skis — he might buy that pair from Jeremy, who would n't be using them after all, as he would n't be going with the Stantons. Rather glad, really, he was n't going with them! Daffy was becoming a bit of a bore. He kept remembering Veronique's oval face and slanting gray-blue eyes. He 'd never noticed her much before; she was quiet — a good thing in a woman, really. Astonishing that she could pretty nearly beat her brother at tennis. Nothing highbrow about her, and at the same time she was n't silly; and her dancing knocked Daffy's into a cocked hat. Something about the way she moved that was fearfully jolly.

Denis sat with his arms crossed, his chin sunk in his muffler. Out of the corner of his eye he saw Athene's profile set against the wind. He was thinking of Patricia. He was wondering how much it really hurt him to think about her and to face the fact that she did n't love him. One had no touchstone for the reality of one's own emotions; impossible to tell what was spontaneous and what was induced; and anyway, what did it matter? And yet was n't there something that Patricia could give, and yet would never give to him — a secret fire, a strange, hidden, blinding beauty? Some-

thing one felt in her, making one aching and thirsty and tormented. Or was it all a feverish delusion? Weren't all women, finally and ludicrously, the same —an imaginary refuge from the incessant malice of the actual?

Athene's shoulder was against his. Something charming and obstinate about her lower lip, a caress in the curve of her lashes. Her very sureness could make her, as at this moment, as unaware of herself as a child. Something provocative about this "child" look, this unconscious air of purity.

Athene was watching the landscape. The clouds hung low, and a faint drizzle was blown against their faces. Ahead of them the road streaked upward and away between russet fields toward Melbury. At Caldecott Hollow an old man wheeling a barrow stopped and stared at them and touched his crumpled hat. They passed a cluster of cottages, golden-gray as the stone of Sezindean manor. Two children were playing with a black kitten while a woman sat on a wooden chair in a doorway and cried, her shoulders hunched, her apron held to her face. On the edge of a leafless copse a tramp lay asleep; he looked filthy, and Athene was momentarily saddened by the sight of him. A band of cyclists whizzed past, youthful village louts wearing mackintoshes and "buttonholes." In the distance now, between those clumps of great oak trees, Yoxalls, white and drowsy. Tall, quiet windows; wide, quiet proportions; stately, yet with none of the rich-flavored stateliness of Sezindean. A fat farmer driving a fat gray cob, touching his hat. On the sky line a man and a girl holding hands, walking down the side of the field by the low stone wall; bounding near them a tailless woolly object that Athene recognized as Achilles.

When they got in, tea was ready in front of the fire,

and Mary looked up from the sofa to greet them. The ugly red curtains were drawn, and the big clumsy armchairs were ranged in a semicircle round the tea table as if they were only waiting to make their guests comfortable. The brilliance of the firelight showed up the marks of nailed boots on the dark polished boards and the ravages of puppies' teeth on the rugs, and it flickered on the delicate relief of the ceiling. Athene felt it all suddenly — the solid, gentle friendliness of it all, the comfortableness, the unassuming elegance and easy-going disorder, the charm of the Victorian grandfather's clock in the corner, and Achilles' immense dirty cushion near the fireplace, and the Georgian silver teapot and the wicker cakestand. An endearing ugliness that wasn't ugliness; an elusive beauty, more poignant than any æsthetic perfection.

She remembered Geoffrey's words: "Exquisite? No — it isn't exactly exquisite. But it's such a heavenly place to come home to."

"Homeliness," analyzed Athene. The explanation appealed to her.

PART THREE

I

ATHENE had finally decided upon Chelsea.

Chelsea, she averred, had atmosphere. She'd told the house agent, a rotund gentleman called Mr. Bickerstaff, of Bickerstaff and Company, that she wanted atmosphere; and he, knowing, as he believed, his Americans, assured her that here indeed, in that chosen acreage hemmed in by the mausoleum solidities of Kensington on the north, the elegance of Knightsbridge and Belgravia on the east, bounded southward by the Thames and westward by the squalid tracts of World's End, here and nowhere else was atmosphere to be found — atmosphere, as he'd presently given her to understand, that was worth its cubic space in gold.

For Mr. Bickerstaff had seen and profited by the transformation of Chelsea from an artists' to an artistic quarter. He had seen that conversion of slums ascertainable by the outward sign of a blue door or the inward grace of a bathroom; he had witnessed the springing up of æsthetic mansions in green fields, the flowering of Mulberry Walk, the restrained non-Georgian edification of Vale Avenue, — embellished by a glimpsed Italian garden or the deep-carved fancy of a Russian house, — the colony of cottage costliness in and about Chelsea Park Gardens. In his time the price of antiques had trebled in the murky, dusty shops in the Kings Road; hawkers had come to price logs and oranges for the lovers of the picturesque, while street musicians flourished on an increasing prodigality of silver coin. He knew a succession of clients eagerly awaiting the death of any occupant in a block of charming flats with a view over the Thames, and was aware, possibly with some inner comment upon herd movements among the

wealthy, how that same view filled the houses in Cheyne Walk with a conglomeration of Society and intelligentsia.

There was no inducement, Mr. Bickerstaff's experience taught him, so valuable as view or atmosphere, and Athene's deliberate demand for the latter had made him fairly whirl her over the threshold of 27a, Cheyne Walk, scurrying her up the wide oak staircase and through the paneled rooms, and landing her, breathless and ecstatic, in a lease of ninety-nine years, with option of renewal.

"An American lady," Mr. Bickerstaff had remarked to his wife that evening, "seemed very taken with some carving over the drawing-room mantelpiece."

Apropos of which, Mrs. Bickerstaff had been anxious to tell him about an overmantel she'd seen, cheap, in the High Street that afternoon.

The Bickerstaffs lived in Putney.

II

On the same tide of breathless ecstasy the house was furnished.

Occasionally accompanied by Geoffrey, when he could get away, but more often with Denis or by herself, Athene bought and elaborated her background.

She ranged from the immediacy of the Kings Road to the northern purlieus of Bloomsbury. She peered about and fingered grimed surfaces in alleys off the Tottenham Court Road; she bought a tallboy in Church Street, and five brass warming pans from a persuasive little cockney near Notting Hill Gate. She drove down with Denis and ordered a carload of stuff from Guildford and a dinner service from Dorking. She bought tapestries from a prosperous firm in Soho Square and two Queen Anne mirrors from a Polish Jew in another

part of Soho. She ordered her lampshades at the shop of a dowager countess in Duke Street, her firedogs from the wife of a well-known portrait painter, and "picked up"—as she employed the current phrase—some Persian rugs in St. James's Street. A youthful baronet with a lisp, whom Denis introduced to her and who had recently gone into decoration in partnership with a popular actress, designed her dress cupboards and painted a fresco of monkeys and pomegranates and parrakeets round the dining room.

For Denis had asserted the obviousness of period furnishing, urging a delicate mean of the good and the clever, a steering between the Scylla of tradition and the Charybdis of crazes. And the youthful baronet had remarked, standing with one heel raised and toe turned in, and one hand poised as though he had just plucked an unwanted speck from the wide lapel of his coat: "What I alwayth thay ith, Mithith Graham, justht the teenietht drop of new wine in the old bottle."

By March the house was ready. Geoffrey had n't seen it during the final stages of arrangement and decoration, and when he and Athene met in the evening in their temporary flat in Westminster she showed a desire more and more to keep it as a surprise.

She 'd found that she wanted his approval and his admiration. She wanted him to see what she could achieve, and had a feeling that perhaps, through that achievement, she might in some way reveal to him the "self" in her that he so queerly seemed to miss—a complex, half-spiritual, half-æsthetic self, the self that must have made Denis say that she, in her way, was an artist.

In the choice and furnishing of the house she had, as she felt, expressed herself, and her fear was that Geoffrey might miss that, as he missed, it seemed, so many

aspects of her personality. For she was haunted by the perpetual and vaguely disquieting sense that Geoffrey loved her blindly and without discrimination.

III

Geoffrey watched his class put their notebooks together and scuttle or meander out of the lecture room.

He glanced up at the clock, set high in a heaven of shining art-green dado. Three minutes past twelve. The sea of fumed-oak desks was becoming empty. Athene would n't be here for ten minutes anyway. She was to pick him up and drive him along to Cheyne Walk.

At the back of the room an Indian in a navy-blue blazer was finishing off his notes. Near him a couple of pallid, eager-tongued young men, one of them in pince-nez, were apparently discussing some aspect of the lecture. He caught the phrase, "purchasing-power parity." They were joined by a stocky young Scotsman who had lately come from Aberdeen University — Macgowan, that was the name; doing some journalism at the same time, correspondent for some Glasgow paper. Macgowan was disagreeing with them, raising his voice. Geoffrey put his notes together.

"But I 'm telling ye the gold standard is an utterly irrelevant and exploded idea! As a political policy it is merely bluff — "

In the second row two girls were talking in undertones: one of them sallow and intelligent and untidy; the other, bold-eyed and red-cheeked, with a magnificent figure, Geoffrey knew had been a factory girl in the North who had won a scholarship.

She nodded to a smart young woman who dashed back for a mislaid book.

The Indian at the back of the room rose and went out with rapid, light steps.

Geoffrey examined the time-table for the week. That Industrial Efficiency lecture to-morrow at ten — useful, those American notes had been.

Macgowan's voice: "There is *no* secret of high wages! The whole problem is as plain as my own hand. . . ."

That extra Factory Legislation class to-morrow evening. A musical party at the Rosenheims. He could join her there. She'd talked about the necessity of common interests and sharing experiences when he couldn't get away for Lady Blandon's luncheon party last week. As if he didn't *want* to be with her.

"Geoff darling!"

He was aware how Macgowan suddenly stopped ranting. He felt his heartbeats shudder to his palms.

She came up to his desk. The scent of her was strange in this pervasive faint air of Sanitas.

"I was told I'd find you in here."

Her black coat etched her slenderness.

The two girls had ceased to whisper, and while she looked round she gave out to them an implicit amiability.

"So this is where you lecture?"

Her gloved hand rested on the front of his desk.

"Mostly in here, yes."

She nodded approval toward the windows.

"Very hygienic; and where is the library?"

He explained to her while they strolled toward the door.

"And the heating pipes go here." She gave each detail the attention he'd seen her give to the tombs in Westminster Abbey. He saw Macgowan and the pallid young men staring.

"Were those some of your students?"

"Yes." He stepped after her into the car. They moved down Kingsway and into the Strand.

"What class of men are they?" She took up the speaking tube. "Go by the Embankment, Hervey, *not* by Trafalgar Square."

"Difficult to say. They vary."

They passed the House of Commons. The black rubber capes of the policemen shone in the drizzle. Big Ben chimed the half hour, its great chimes syncopated by lesser chimes from other quarters of Westminster. Two barges passed each other, sunk deep in the swollen tide of the river. She began to tell him about a Labor meeting that Bobs had taken her to the night before.

She powdered her nose and chin, narrowing her lashes to look into the minute circle of her mirror.

"I used to belong to the Labor Party for a time. I worked for a great friend of mine who got in as a Labor candidate — the election that brought in a Labor Government."

"Then why —"

"One's conclusions are usually of little value. However, mine eventually turned me back into a Liberal."

They passed Tite Street. She seemed to be reflecting upon his words.

"The Blandons are Liberals, aren't they?"

"Yes. Lord Blandon contributes largely to the Party funds."

"Lady Blandon has promised to take me to see a Welfare Centre that she's patroness of next week. It can't be far from here."

The car drew up.

"Now, Geoff darling —" She was just perceptibly breathless.

The door was a dimmed canary yellow, flanked by

tall orange trees in yellow wooden tubs. He could n't help remembering the portals of a famous beauty specialist on Fifth Avenue, and Athene pointing it out to him. Obviously she had n't remembered. And the effect had charm.

She slipped in her latchkey.

"Now," she cried, "Open Sesame!" and her laughter fluttered and fell like shining petals over the threshold.

IV

They halted in the drawing-room.

"This is the pride of my heart." She made him step back.

Rose-red curtains framing sky and river and the umbrellas scurrying near the balustrade of the Embankment. Westward, Battersea Bridge crouching across the water, the ships passing, antlike and intent, beneath the rigid hollows of its belly.

She said: "The chairs and sofas are copied exactly from the ones at Knole, in that long gallery; you see, even the footstool 's the same. That cabinet 's a genuine Queen Anne, and that chair 's genuine antique too. Look at the carving on the stretcher — a cherub's head! Is n't that just too *adorable?*"

They were hers. She showed off their paces. "I would n't have the paneling painted. I adore it just the way it is."

"It 's lovely, darling. The whole room 's exquisite." He gazed about. There was an irreproachable picturesqueness in it all, a studied harmony.

"I hope you like my color scheme in here? These shades of red, with all the dark wood? I mean always to have red roses in here, and more — *conscious* kind of flowers in the dining room."

"With the monkey-and-parrot walls?"

"Exactly."

"Why not a cactus?"

She was arrested by the idea.

"Ye-e-es. Only cactuses aren't very — well, not quite colorful enough."

"You could have them painted."

"Yes." She stopped, and then gave an indecisive smile. "Yes," she repeated lightly, but her moving away awoke in him again that elusive, stammering little pain.

"Darling — sweetheart, I was only teasing."

"Yes," she smiled with the faintest trace of difficulty, "I know, dear."

She made him feel humble, and rather absurd, and clumsy. He amended: —

"This view of the river's so perfect. One might — that black tug with the squat, sloping funnel — one might watch the river all day, and never want to move; just sit and watch the ships." He remembered seeing the river for the first time, his mother lifting him up to look over the balustrade. "That's the Thames, Geoff. Perhaps that ship's come all the way from Spain with oranges inside it." He'd wanted to be a sailor.

She stood between him and the river, and the river became her background. Red curtains, gray river, her face chiseled by the light.

"I'm glad you like it, dear. And now you still haven't seen the studio."

He followed her up to the third floor.

"It'll do for parties," she said, "when one wants to be kind of — Bohemian. Or for any kind of a meeting."

The room was long, golden-walled, full of light. A grand piano. A dais. He saw her — her meetings;

Lady Blandon and her hobbies; the Health Club—"oranges and wheat biscuits." Athene, adorably earnest—"vitamines." Athene, serene as a Madonna—"the alimentary tract."

"Or it'd be just gorgeous for folk dancing. Lady Rosenheim's crazy about folk dancing; that and Negro spirituals."

"It's a good room. Lovely and light."

"It was two rooms, with a door connecting, so I had it made into one. It was really Denis's idea."

He glanced at her sharply, but her profile was toward the picture hung in an alcove at the farther end of the room.

"That's the Gauguin," she remarked with satisfaction.

He stared, and felt himself steeped in its sultry brilliance, half hypnotized by its powerful pattern.

"Denis says that absolutely makes the room."

The picture lost its power for him. He nodded abstractedly. She was so—so remote from the ordinary and fundamental. Didn't she see—? The words broke from him:—

"Don't you see, darling, that Denis is falling in love with you?"

She turned slowly to him, wonderingly.

"But Denis is in love with Patricia."

"Was—perhaps. Imagined himself."

She shook her head.

"He's told me. He feels terribly attracted by her, and he admires her mind, only she doesn't seem to be his affinity, and it's—breaking up his soul."

He recognized the final phrase—Denis—on her lips.

"And so he—comes to you for consolation?"

The irony grazed off her shining armor.

"He comes to me for understanding, dear."

He had an insane desire to shake her. He controlled his voice.

"Nevertheless, I assure you he's quite obviously in love with you."

Her beautiful faint scorn jabbed and angered him.

"There are a great many kinds of love. I think that I can help Denis Mortlake, where another woman —"

His anger ebbed from his veins, and left him trembling.

"I'm sorry, darling — I'm a beast. I didn't mean to seem jealous and stupid and interfering. It's only —" She came closer, exquisitely forgiving. "It's only because I love you so that I can be so — idiotic. Probably I'm wrong." She let him take her in his arms. "Probably I am simply and tiresomely jealous, because I love every hour and every word with you."

She stood on tiptoe and kissed him gently, and patted his shoulder with her gloved hand.

"We won't speak about it any more, honey."

For a moment he held her still in his arms.

"And yet — it's natural," he said, "to be jealous — a little."

She disengaged herself.

"But nature is rather inclined to be crude." And then, making him turn round for a last survey of the studio, "Are you pleased now with our — home?"

Home. Funny word for this — all this immaculate taste — beauty — chic.

"I think you've been wonderful over it. And when we've lived in it for a time —"

"Of course," she agreed, "it needs to be lived in, to — to give it," she hesitated, "bouquet."

Again he recognized Denis in her choice of word. Her adaptability was so responsive; already she'd

changed — small changes of manner, opinion, phrase, partly deliberate, partly, he divined, unconscious.

She pointed out the extensive cupboards on the landing.

"They're rather good, aren't they? And there was a sort of little white gate here at the top of the stairs; I suppose this story must have been for nurseries."

V

Against the dictates of her conscience, Bobs was to be married in church.

When Jeremy had said, "Oh, but darling, I *do* want to see you in a white dress — and think of all our people — and a Registry Office would be so — sort of cold and fishy," her conscience was dimmed. She'd told him that it was all sentimentality, and he had looked troubled and kissed her very solemnly, so that she was ashamed.

She found herself in those weeks before the wedding giving in against her judgment in innumerable matters. She didn't think there should be champagne; she didn't like the idea of asking a lot of guests who'd feel they had to give you presents; the idea of spending Athene's check on a honeymoon in the Italian Lakes appalled her sense of proportion. She said: "But, Jeremy, when a railway porter or — a butcher marries, *he* can't go off to play about in the sun and spend so much money for three weeks!" To which Jeremy replied that luckily he wasn't a railway porter or a butcher.

Her long silver dress from Traville enchanted yet afflicted her; she protested, "But, Mummie, people with the sort of income we shall have — It seems dreadful. And you could get six absolutely heavenly dogs for that amount!" At her fittings she contemplated the image of her straight, shining, pale dress, and her straight,

daffodil-bright hair — she saw what Jeremy would see — and silver slippers peeping out. Then, observing a mannequin trail past, she remembered how they were underpaid. She was stubborn and silent when Mr. Traville himself tripped in and, emitting a scent of violets, assured her that she looked too marvelous for words; yet, again, she acknowledged the image in the glass.

The dress. Presents. Jeremy booking reservations on the train and boat. Clifford's letter announcing his purchase of a new silk hat. Jeremy's indecisions about his tie. The twenty-fifth of March, Lady Day. . . . Impossible quite to realize. Mummie's new dress. And would Chidley really remember to give Achilles his biscuits? Father fussing about the church decorations, fuming off to scrap with Mr. Summerbee.

March the twenty-fourth. The household upside down; piles of little plates, the furniture all turning into buffets. Athene and Geoff arriving from Cheyne Row, the car loaded with white roses and carnations for the house; Athene had had roses and carnations at her reception, she said. Clifford on his motor bike from Oxford; a Bond Street hatter's box on the carrier. More presents by the evening post — more notes to write. Achilles padding about at her heels, shaking his woolly head and lolling his pink tongue in vague perplexity. Mummie advising her to go to bed early — kissing her. Her heart beating furiously every now and then — stupid — sentimental. To-morrow! Did she, did n't she, want to? Could it, would it, be so lovely? Or was this all just claptrap sentiment? And was this, anyway, the real fundamental business of life — orange blossoms, honeymoons? And Athene was talking about trades-unions. "My idea is, you see, Geoff, that the spirit of coöperation between your employers and your workmen is lacking, and it's *that* —" Dreams? Illu-

sions? Fostering the great superstition of marriage? If Jeremy came now and said, "For a time, while we care enough," would n't that be more reasonable?

Jeremy came after dinner, to say good night. He said: —

"Darling, I shall love you for ever and ever and ever."

VI

The bridal couple had gone, and gradually the guests, assuming wraps, furs, gloves, and silk hats, departed on a tide of congratulatory farewell, treading confetti into the gravel as they entered their cars.

From the dining room came the rattling of plates and spoons and glasses being piled on to trays.

Clifford surveyed his image in the mirror in the hall, and carefully wiped his forehead. He had a feeling that everything had been very creditable, and that it was pleasant — and rather a relief — to think of Bobs married. Queer too to think that she, of all people, — he could n't help the mental interpolation, — should have been the occasion of all this creditableness. And Veronique had been, well, fearfully sweet to him. He could n't help thinking, since that fancy-dress dance at Wengen — jolly things, weddings!

In the library Athene sank into a chair.

"Did n't she look just too adorable for words?"

Geoffrey and Patricia agreed. Charles Graham, straddling on the hearthrug, grunted satisfaction. He had immensely enjoyed giving her away, walking up the aisle with her arm in his. She 'd actually been trembling. Bobs trembling! Poor little thing, he 'd felt quite worried about her; but she seemed all right once the service had started. Solemn, though; no idea Bobs was religious; always seemed rather the other thing.

"I'm sure it's a good thing," Patricia said. Geoffrey lit a cigarette and sat down on the arm of Athene's chair.

"I've never seen Bobs look so happy."

"Of course," Athene considered, "she's very public-spirited and she's got terribly strong ideas; I should say she's bound to feel the call of some kind of a career." She seemed delicately to weigh her words. "I should n't say she'll find a purely domesticated life — satisfying."

Patricia saw the sudden contraction of Geoffrey's features, a tightening of lips and nostrils, a painful, slanted lowering of the eyelids. She saw Athene's troubled, half-challenging, upward glance at him.

Charles Graham was emphatic.

"A woman don't want a career when she's married. There's too much of that kind of nonsense talked. Marriage is a career, and I'm inclined to think it's the greatest career a woman can have." His glance wandered toward Mary, who was looking out of the window.

"It's often," said Patricia, "as difficult a one as she can have"; and she too looked toward her mother's slender, upright back. "Muddling about with clay is easier."

"But surely," Athene was serenely persuasive, "a woman can do both?"

Patricia was dubious. "Not the kind Bobs might do, anyway. I mean a lot of political speaking, or an organizing job. She could, of course — but it would probably take up a lot of her time."

Her sister-in-law's stare was upon her. "Well, it's pretty queer to hear you say that, Patricia."

"I — I only suppose. I'm not sure. And anyway I'm not married."

Athene veered back to the main argument. "But surely a woman, married or unmarrried, must express herself?"

Geoffrey got up and went to join his mother by the

window; she turned and took his hand in hers, and looked away again. Patricia found herself attacking Athene.

"What a woman makes of her marriage and of her husband's happiness is usually sufficient expression of her personality."

Athene's eyes widened. She was puzzled by Patricia's tone; moreover, she could n't fit in such sentiments with her conception of Patricia as an artist.

Sir Charles appeared to have been thinking.

"When a woman 's married," he said, "she has a family — or she ought to have." It crossed his mind that this might be a hint to Athene, for he wanted and expected a grandson. "And when she has a family, she 's got plenty to do and plenty to interest her. That 's the natural duty and the natural life for a normal young healthy woman."

Athene shook her head. She disagreed, gently and absolutely, yet without a hint of annoyance. She never lost her temper, and even in indignation she retained the sanity of righteousness.

"A woman is an individual, and she has her own life to lead. Bobs has got more brains than Jeremy, and she has a right to use them; and maybe she *ought* to use them for the service of the community."

Sir Charles gruffled.

"If she makes her husband a good home and looks after her family, she can't do better for the community. Bobs 'll settle down and have a family, and rid her head of all this Socialist nonsense." He paused and leaned back, his thumbs thrust into the armholes of his buff waistcoat. "A woman's place is in the home."

Patricia slipped her arm through his.

"Oh, Father darling!" Her husky contralto laughter pleased him; he relaxed.

"Well, Pat, what *is* it? Why the — ?"

"Dear," she said, "and does the hand that rocks the cradle rule the world?"

He liked the handsome set of her head and her white, beautiful teeth; handsome she was — spirited, too. Pity. He almost wished it was Pat who'd been married. His reply had geniality and a tenderness for her.

"Yes," he said, "laugh at me if you like, Pat, and Athene, you can preach your modern American notions at your old father-in-law — and it isn't only American either, I'm afraid — till doomsday. But it's true all the same — the hand that rocks the cradle and so on. And the sooner you young people stop reformin' the universe with your theories and whatnots and settle down to the business of bringin' up healthy, sensible children, the sooner the world will be reformed. All your chatter about the future of the country and service to the community — a lot of bunkum! Look after your children, and the future'll look after itself."

He beamed; every problem seemed to him malleable in the ruddy glow of his philosophy.

Patricia took a box of cigarettes off the mantelpiece. She saw herself fashioning dead images on a rubbish heap; an infinity of years, and a few gaping masks at the end. She saw herself shut out, working with silly, feverish fingers. The ruddy glow beckoned to her from indoors, but the doors were locked.

Athene still followed the argument: —

"But when the children grow up?"

Mary turned away from the dusk just beyond the window.

"What are you all talking about?" She smiled faintly, but her sense of Geoffrey's unhappiness pressed on her heart. And Bobs, who had gone away, beyond the dusk . . .

Patricia lit a match, and Mary saw that her hand shook.

"Oh — just ships and sealing-wax, Mummie."

Mary said, "I think I shall go up and take off my hat."

Out in the hall she found Clifford finishing a bottle of champagne.

"Helping to tidy up, Mother."

She lit to his irresponsible, gay smile.

Perhaps it was Bobs being the first that made it seem so strange.

She took off her hat. She was happy for Bobs — happy. Her hand was cold against her hot forehead. But Geoffrey —

"Yes? Come in."

Athene.

"Mother, have you a headache? I thought maybe you had, and I brought along some eau de Cologne."

Mary shook her head.

"Thank you, my dear; that was sweet of you." (She wanted to say, "Don't break his heart, my dear, don't!") "I'm only — a little tired."

Athene's quiet and solicitous "I expect you'd like to have a rest, anyway."

"I think perhaps I will."

"I'll leave you, then. You relax for a while, Mother, and you'll feel quite fresh again."

"I'm sure I shall."

The door closing.

(Don't break his heart, my dear, don't — don't!)

Achilles sprawled in Bobs's room, his head resting between his great soft paws. Once he got up and drank from the jug by the washstand, and then flopped down again.

Once a piece of tissue paper blew across the floor, and his black square nose quivered. Then his head thudded down again between his paws, and he resigned himself once more to his anxious yet trustful vigil.

VII

Bobs lay awake.

The stars were enormous diamond flares; softly burning diamonds. One of them fell and was lost.

The stars were jagged by the glimmering peaks of the mountains; the glimmer sheered down to gulfing shadows, and the shadows to a blacker darkness, and the black mountain-sides sheered into the lake and the stars in the lake.

Jeremy was asleep.

The stars made her dizzy. She shut her eyes, and drowned under sweeping mists of color. Now the stars were far off — and Jeremy was at her side. Stretching out her hand, she touched his shoulder.

The scent of mimosa drifted up from the garden.

She'd been married a week — a long time ago. . . . Jeremy's quiet breathing.

The night was black and silver. Terribly queer, to love anyone so much, more and more. Nothing else mattered, really. Nothing, in comparison, had any importance. Queer!

Jeremy — darling. . . .

That one could ever have thought that other interests, any other life — when this was life itself, the beginning and end of life. . . .

Again the scent of mimosa, drenching the room.

Jeremy stirred in his sleep.

She felt the tears stinging her cheeks; their warm bitterness was on her mouth.

"Bobs — darling, sweetheart!"

Drowsily he took her in his arms. She shut her eyes. She thought: "For ever and ever and ever. Till death do us part."

VIII

Driving through Bedford Square and noting the pleasant irradiation of May sunshine and the green flutter of lime trees, Athene asked herself whether it would n't, partly in consideration of the charm of some of those houses, but mostly in deference to a kind of fashion, have been wiser to live in Bloomsbury. In selecting Cheyne Walk it had n't, as yet, quite dawned upon her what Bloomsbury might mean.

She wondered. She remembered Denis scoffing at the Bloomsbury intelligensia; his summary of their creed: "I believe in Plastic Form and in the triumph of Mind over Morals." It was conceivable that Geoffrey's type of mind, a certain vigor of intellect, might have been better disposed in this perhaps more *recherché,* yet surely less charming, vicinity; might even be more inspired, more — she brooded — "active." For it troubled her that, in Chelsea, he should be so often content to sit and watch the river. If he had been a poet, a novelist, she could have accepted and even rejoiced in the tendency. But she saw him as essentially a man of action, and fostered for him more and more the notion of an active political destiny, with which this "sitting and thinking" seemed incompatible. He needed — she grasped in a spasm of perplexity at a native vulgarism — more "pep" — to be more of a "go-getter."

She was beset by the feeling that he wasted time, and discouraged by a realization that his notion of time-wasting differed from hers. Her own increasing busyness,

the tabulated multiplicity of her philanthropic and social duties, impressed him chiefly as — in his own words — "taking up too much of her time." He had, and it was a trait she had come to perceive in a diversity of English people, an implicit belief in leisure — not just as a holiday to be filled with holiday activities, but rather as indefinable spaces of time, allotted to no particular use or purpose, yet prized with the Englishman's peculiar and intimate and quite inexpressible passion for tracts of property.

The car drew up in Doughty Street by a dark, high house with large windows.

"Come back in an hour as usual, Fernley."

She climbed up stone steps to the third floor of the house. Patricia, in her brown smock, opened the door.

"You're always so punctual, Athene." She preceded her into the studio. "I've been exasperated about your mouth — it's quite wrong." She stood away critically from the bust on the stand, and then turned the narrowed look on her sister-in-law. "I've made it much too hard — too set."

Athene took off her hat and settled herself in her accustomed chair, examining the contours of the clay from her angle.

"You mean it makes me look too old?"

Still Patricia's gaze moved from her work to the original.

"Not exactly that. It makes you look too concluded."

Athene bent on her a look of faintly skeptical interest.

Patricia took up a spatula and began to work at the lips and chin.

After a time Athene asked: —

"Did your mother come to see it yesterday?"

Patricia nodded; her thumb worked round the muscles of the mouth.

"And what did she think about it?"

"Liked it. But she didn't think the mouth was right, either."

She walked back a few paces.

"I think it looks — awake. Don't you?"

Athene recognized with an impersonal pleasure the light, vigorous grace of the head, turned a little sideways and tilted up from the neck and shoulders; the closely flowing hair covering the ears and converging to a knot at the slim nape; the square, fragile lines of the cheek bones and jaw.

"I think it's a most beautiful thing you're doing, Patricia."

"I think it may come out quite well."

She went to it again in silence; the thing drew her, absorbed her. Gradually she began to feel her fingers working with a blind, sensuous cunning of their own, touching and pressing the thick cold substance of the clay — working, and subtilizing, and giving life to the surfaces, and, as they worked, radiating from their tips a throbbing vitality that seemed to her to be dragged from the very pit of her being. She felt herself within the transparent walls of a trance. She was clearly aware of Athene; every now and then she spoke to her and received her answers. The studio floor marked with powdered clay, and her own overall, and the sounds out in the street, were all quite clear — and quite irrelevant. It was like being in an aquarium. Athene told her something about Geoffrey being so unwilling to go into political life just yet. But Geoffrey too was outside the aquarium. She heard herself say:—

"I expect later on — "

And Athene, saying, "I feel it's his vocation — "

And she observed herself think that possibly Athene felt political "hostessing" to be her own vocation. She

heard Athene's "Denis says Geoffrey has the mind of a statesman."

The slope beneath the lower lid was too shallow.

"Denis doesn't usually mean anything he says."

And it was quite clear to her, through her transparent walls, that Athene only deduced from this remark an excusable and yet unworthy chagrin at Denis's friendship with herself.

There was something about the outer ends of the eyes, something peculiar, that she had n't quite — Slanting up, the fine, long, wakeful eyelids slanting up only so little, and the brow widened and smoothed, even more, to give that effect of innocence. The lips were softer now, parted — just a slight exaggeration of their being parted, to emphasize that air of expectancy, a vital and — no, not quite greedy — rather a demanding expectancy: a child, demanding.

Athene said it was three-thirty and she had an appointment to try on her Court dress at three-forty-five at Traville's, after which, she enumerated, she had to go to a private view at the Rutland Galleries; get to a committee meeting for a Charity Ball at five o'clock; pick Geoffrey up at the School of Economics at six o'clock; and then have a manicure at home before dressing to dine at the House of Commons at seven-thirty.

"You're dining with father?"

"Yes — quite a party, and we're to hear the debate afterward."

Gradually the trance broke away round Patricia. It was like coming up — back into thin air and sharp loud noise.

Her own voice sounded angular and naked: "When can you come again?"

Athene consulted her diary.

"To-morrow's my afternoon at the Baby Welfare

Centre. Thursday — no, Thursday's hopeless. Friday? In the morning?"

"Yes. Stay to lunch."

"As a matter of fact, I promised to take luncheon with Bobs at their flat."

"She's being presented too, isn't she? Mother said something — "

"Yes. She was terribly against it at first and said she never had been; and then apparently Jeremy said he'd like to have her go, and so she thought perhaps she would, after all."

"It's rather fun, really. I'm sure I shall find it a tremendously interesting experience."

When Athene had gone, Patricia went into her bedroom and cast off her smock in a sudden distaste, and washed her face in cold water. She wondered why she should suddenly remember bathing years ago with the three boys in summer holidays, Geoffrey and Antony and Philip. The deep coolness of the river; diving in from willow stumps; Antony ducking her, and Philip shouting, "Duck him back, Pat"; and swimming races with Geoffrey; and the twins sitting on the bank and their nurse only letting them dabble their toes.

She was tired, and tired of everything. Even work, which could be suddenly a flame between your hands, as suddenly died out.

She faced the fact that she was tired of life and had all life to live. And one had, she told herself, to live it with a decent show of interest because — she came back to a phrase that had so often expressed for her what she knew to be actually inexpressible, even in her own thoughts — because of "the fitness of things." A certain standard, like always having clean underclothes, that mattered to one, irrespective of any outside seeming.

She heard a ring at the door. Bobs, perhaps; she'd

said she might. She went across the studio, out into the small entrance passage, and opened the door, and stepped back with a cry.

IX

He came in and shut the door behind him. He was saying things in broken phrases: that he'd been walking past from a friend's rooms, looked up at the big window, seen her face.

He was pale; he seemed very tall. She led him into the studio and he said:—

"This—of course—that big window there."

He was looking at her.

"I couldn't help it—coming up. My dear—"

She said very distinctly:—

"I don't quite see why, John."

She felt herself drown in his white look.

"I saw you, my dear. I couldn't help it."

He hadn't changed. The way his hair grew back, dark and thick; the hard, sweet, nervous mouth; the one-armed, so slightly uneven movements.

She said, "What's the use of your being here?"

She wanted to be brutal. She began to see that he looked older; under his heavy brows his eyes looked older. She sat down. He stared and started at her face.

She felt as though her unhappiness were going to break her body to pieces. He came and sat down beside her like a man spent from frightful exertion; she saw that his forehead was wet.

She said: "How is your—family?" in a tight, absurd voice, as if she were playing tea parties with him. But he took no notice.

"Patricia, my dear!"

"You oughtn't to have come up."

"I know. But it was stronger than — than me. I saw you, and it all came back. You — everything — "

Involuntarily she broke in with a hard sharp question: —

"Came back?"

"Came — from below the surface, if you like. I've tried to — to choke it up, not to think, in the last years. Sometimes I managed not to. I thought I was forgetting. Then it used to come back doubly, frightfully; something would remind me — something we'd seen together or spoken of."

She made herself look him straight in the eyes.

"You've managed to be happy," she stated.

He took her hand; the contact was a light in their blind desolation.

He admitted, "I've had exactly what I suppose I went in for. All the things that — we couldn't have had: a charming house, travel, entertaining, plenty of leisure; the allurements of life. I suppose I tried to drug myself with them — beauty and leisure, and comfort. My wife and I are just pleasantly fond of each other; we don't tax each other's emotions, and we make a 'delightful couple.' We have a lot of friends. Every winter we go to the Riviera; we have a flat in London and a house in Sussex. I manage to play quite a good game of golf with my useful arm, and Peggy is very keen on golf and tennis. She has various flirtations with the young men who dance and play tennis with her, but they are nice healthy flirtations, on the American model, — a little 'petting' and no hearts broken, — and our *ménage* continues to be admirable."

"And your children?"

He let go her hand.

"We have two little boys. Peggy is a very good mother." He visibly maintained his tone of detachment.

"The eldest is five, the other is three. They're rather nice."

"You've been happy," she repeated. She saw him playing with his little boys.

"It's like being drugged; it seemed all right; then it would wear off. Then one took more — more diversion of some kind, and it was better; then it began to wear off again."

She said, "I've often thought about it, quite clearly. I think perhaps I was wrong to let you go. I could have stopped you, but I was afraid you were right." She paused, staring before her. She tried to see their life, John's and hers, as it might be now if they'd married six years ago. "Perhaps you were," she whispered.

His words shuddered in the wide studio.

"No. I wasn't. I was wrong. And you were right when you said that it seemed like selling love to Mammon."

She sat straight and still. She was aware of him trembling.

"Why did you marry?"

He was silent; then he forced out: —

"Because I hadn't the strength to live alone without you. I believe that's called 'on the rebound.'"

She bent her head.

"I think I — understand."

He said, "I heard that you were going to marry Denis Mortlake."

She shook her head.

"I never could." The words came dangerously between her dry lips. "I love you too much, my dear."

He started, drew back. She caught "Don't!" under his breath.

"Should you," she continued, "have minded?"

"Yes."

They could n't look at each other. She found herself staring at the clay shoulders of Athene. She felt her last strength ebbing.

He spoke with an abrupt, passionate force: —

"We 've got to be friends — that at least."

She turned to him. She pleaded.

"Is that possible? It 's all too — too mixed — too big." She added, "You must go away, my dear."

She began to sob.

"Darling! Patricia, my dear!"

Her sobs choked and tore her.

He was on his knees beside her, dragging her hands from her face.

"Darling — darling!" He muttered, "Let 's go away. Let 's forget all this horrible complication, dearest, beloved! Peggy would n't care. She 'd divorce me; she would n't mind a bit. I 'd no idea — I never believed — you still cared."

She could n't speak; she drew his head against her shoulder. His phrases racked her nerves. "Patricia, life 's so short! I must have been mad. All the time I knew I loved you, and I hated life, and loathed myself. I was afraid — I was so damnably wrong — afraid about money. I thought poverty was too — ugly."

"My dear — that 's all over."

"I did n't know — what ugliness could be — "

His dearness mastered her thoughts, dizzied her. She saw the fine, faint stains in his eye-sockets, the nervous working of his jaw. She kissed his forehead, and tasted her own tears. Her fingers smoothed his hair.

"Dear; you must go away. We can't either of us think now."

"We — I — thought too much. Darling, we *know* that we love each other."

"We knew — before."

Kneeling, he held her, and it seemed to her that his look closed about her, drenching her with its fierce, tortured sweetness. He spoke with his lips close to hers: "Darling, I was a fool and a coward. I've known it all these years. Hundreds of times I've wanted to come back to you, but I didn't dare. I thought — in a way, I hoped — you'd forget. I couldn't see straight, my dear, when I threw it all over. I thought I was doing right. I was warped by my own childhood. And when you said — d'you remember, we'd stopped by the Peter Pan statue in Kensington Gardens — that if we loved each other enough, money wouldn't count, I told myself you were just being — romantic, because your parents had always been comfortably off, and that I hadn't any right to disillusion you."

She whispered, "It's too late, John dear; you can't."

"But I can. I will. It isn't as if Peggy would mind. Darling, I think it was Fate that made me look up and see you. Don't you see, my dear, we've got to do it? It's too strong for us?"

She tried to break away from him, but he gripped her. She closed her eyes.

"It shouldn't be too strong; we're weak."

"Dear, don't let's be artificial now. It's too real. Both our lives. There's only convention."

She breathed: "There's more than that."

"My dear, if you love me, if you still can love me — "

Still her eyes were shut.

"You know — you know that I love you."

He said: "Isn't that all that matters?" He pleaded fiercely: "Don't you see — if I go back, if we each go back, we shall be throwing away our last chance? Don't you see, my dear? The awful waste — the utter futility of the future."

She saw it more clearly than he did.

She gave in.

But some force, stronger than herself, working against her heart and mind and senses, drove her to make terms: —

"In a year, if you still want to, then come back. We can't do it like this, on a wild impulse; it's too — important for that. For a year we must n't see each other. Probably I shall go away. I'm having a show in New York and later in Chicago this autumn. I shall go over there — "

The force worked through her on him. He fought.

"A year, dearest! Another long, wasted year!" But finally he accepted. He went, as she'd hoped he would, without kissing her.

He said: "In a year!" and she saw that his face was young again. But when he'd gone she felt as if her youth had been drained from her body.

X

ATHENE was late. Denis had been to luncheon, and she'd come by bus to the Welfare Centre. She always came by bus on principle. Also she delighted in the experience. She had sent Denis in the car to the Tate Gallery.

Already the waiting room was half filled and the babies were crying. The smell was wafted to her even as she came down the corridor.

Sister Cary came out of the inner room for a moment. Athene apologized: —

"I'm just terribly sorry, Sister."

"It's all right, Mrs. Graham, I've been doing the files myself." She was too busy to be annoyed and too efficient to be "put out"; she was used to voluntary workers.

"I'll just run up and slip on my overall."

She came down again in a white overall. She wore a clean one every time; she believed in the moral as well as the pleasing effect of her specklessness.

"Good afternoon, Mrs. Honeybourne. Good afternoon, Mrs. Drew. Well, Mrs. Dickens, how's Nora to-day — is her cold better?"

She took over the attendance list from Sister Cary. Her job was to take down the names, and look them up in the filed "case cards" of the Centre, and send in their cards to the doctor.

Getting used to the atmosphere, she relaxed her smile and began looking down the list.

"Mrs. Lambert is n't here yet, is she?"

She addressed a woman near her, who was nursing a dull-eyed baby with a scar on its cheek. The woman raised an anæmic, gentle glance.

"She was took bad last night — before 'er time, that is. 'Er 'usband 'ad an awful job to find the nurse. Little boy she's got; only weighs four an' a 'alf pounds. Mrs. Drew" — she nodded toward a bulky woman on the other side of the room — "seen 'im; she don't think 'e 'll live. Terrible thing for 'er, ain't it?"

"I'm terribly sorry. But it'll surely be all right."

Sister Cary opened the inner door.

"Next, please."

Athene surveyed the list.

"Mrs. Drew next. Here's your card, Mrs. Drew."

The woman continued gently, fixing her glance on Athene's face, yet seeming scarcely to notice her: —

"Mrs. Rogers's twins died; *they* was premature." She seemed to brood philosophically, yet with sentiment, on the fact. "An' 'er 'usband 'e 's 'ardly 'ad a job these last two years."

Athene's memory never faltered.

"She 's had another since, has n't she? A little girl."

"That 's right. 'Er fifth that is."

A younger woman, whose neat suit and pink blouse set off her sharp prettiness, had been listening. She broke in with a surprising vehemence: —

"That 's 'ow they go on," she said; "one kid after another till they can't see to turn round. Don't seem to mind if they can afford it or not."

Her neighbor, who was trying to quiet a fractious infant, appeared to find a personal affront.

"Well, it 's nature, ain't it?"

The younger woman glanced with a certain aggressiveness at her neighbor's infant, and then at the podgy little boy in her own arms.

"Nature!" Her scorn sharpened the word. "That 's it. Some 'll come along with a lot a talk about nature; an' the Catholics, they go on the other way — God, they sez it is. But whichever it is," — she looked round the room pertinently and assuredly, facing the other women — "it don't seem to me no reason for bringin' a lot of kids into the world that you can't afford to bring up as they should be brought up."

"That 's right — the pore kids don't arsk to be born. You got to give 'em a chance."

The speaker was older, dragged-looking, with purplish circles under her eyes. She could n't have been more than thirty-five, and some structure of past handsomeness had survived the devastations of her existence.

"Eleven I 've 'ad," she said. Athene perceived a tiny grimy-white bundle hugged in her arms. "An' eight still livin'. But they don't get a charnst, though we do love 'em, every one of 'em, when they do come. And my little George — chrissened after 'is grandfather, 'e was — 'e did 'ave a lovely funeral, like a little

prince. Died o' measles last winter, 'e did; never seemed to 'ave any strength, an' 'e could n't pull through."

Sister Cary's voice: "Next, please."

"Mrs. Cartwright, you next." Athene dispatched her with her card.

But the madonna of the pink blouse was n't to be silenced. She said, sympathetically but firmly: —

"There you are! Always the same story. My 'usband says, 'That 's where the C3 men come in, Liz; they 're the kids as is n't givin a charnst.'"

A big creature in a feathered hat snapped: —

"There ain't many 'usbands as thinks that w'y. They like nature orlright — *they* do!"

A tiny woman, with high cheek bones and a body so narrow as to be almost deformed, piped in a defiant yet sentimentally toned assertion that God sent us our children and we should be grateful for His good gifts.

"And you oughter be ashamed of yerself, Liz, you ought." Her eyes accused the pink blouse. "Your mother was a good Chapel woman, and you was one of twelve yerself."

"Yes. An' my mother was an old woman when she were n't much more than forty; an' not one minute's peace, let alone a good time, did my mother 'ave from the day she was married. And then my father started carryin' on with a woman that lodged near us, — one of 'them,' you know — because the doctor said mother were n't to 'ave no more kids. You and your religious talk! Fair give me the sick, you do."

An apple-cheeked lady carrying a baby, and with a pretty little girl hanging to her skirts, had come in and plumped cheerfully down during this tirade. She wiped the sweat from her face and cocked a jocose thumb at the speaker.

"That 's it," she winked; "there 's Liz Baker at it

again. Always chewin' the rag about birth control. My daughter-in-law 's the same. 'Mother,' she says, 'Will and me, we 've decided upon two kids, neither more nor less.' They 're all the same, these young folk. They want a good time. Not," she beamed and soothed her baby, "not as I blame 'em, and I dessay they 'ave got a bit o' right on their side. But it is a bit of a change from the old times. All beer and skittles for them all right! No nature for them. They gets their babies at Woolworth's, I should say."

Murmurs and laughter greeted this sally.

"Next, please."

"Mrs. Honeybourne."

Athene turned to the late speaker. There was something immensely likable about her broad person, her shining cheeks, her good humor.

"Then you do think that they should have their — good times, Mrs. Widgery?"

"Yes, ma'am, I do. It ain't my way, and I dessay I would n't change; but then I bin a lucky one, and I 've 'ad a good 'usband. That makes the difference, ma'am; 'alves your troubles, as the saying is. I would n't change my 'usband, not if King George was to come an' go on 'is knees to me, I would n't. Same with my children. We was as glad an' joyful over little Susan 'ere," she beamed down at the baby, "as we was over my Will — an all the others in between."

An infant in the corner set up a heart-rending, persistent wail.

"Ssh — ssh." Its mother got up and began to rock it up and down, moving to and fro with flat, tired steps.

Mrs. Widgery shed her geniality in its direction.

"Pore little mite! 'Ungry, I dessay."

A girl, soberly dressed and carrying a very freshly laundered infant, hesitated in the doorway and then awk-

wardly found herself a place next to Athene's table. She was a newcomer, and Athene turned to ask her name and the usual data. The girl spoke in a low voice: —

"Mrs. Ketteridge."

"Husband's occupation?" Athene noted the baby's screwed-up, pale little face and long lashes.

"He was a clerk with a house agent. He was working for Bickerstaff, the agent in Evelyn Row. Then they cut down." She flushed, faltered.

"You mean he's out of work now?"

The girl nodded, her lips set close.

"How many rooms?"

A struggle was dimly visible on the girl's face.

"One," she admitted, and again the color stained her cheek bones.

"How old is the baby?"

"Five weeks."

"First baby?"

"Yes. Little girl."

"This is the first time you've brought her to a doctor?"

"Yes. She does n't seem to put on weight at all, and she cries dreadfully. We've been awake night after night with her; we've hardly had any sleep this week." There was utter fatigue in the voice.

Athene laid down the card she'd been filling in. Suddenly she realized that this girl must be about her own age. She felt horribly troubled. Suddenly all the details that she'd been recording on these buff-colored cards, week after week, seemed to pile up with an enormous threatening wave of wrong — a wrongness incompatible with her religious optimism and dangerous to her serene aspirations. This biweekly work at the clinic had seemed to her both right and interesting, and she'd felt she was "giving." She'd felt too that she was, in this manner,

preparing herself for the ultimately wider exertion of her public spirit. She'd told Geoffrey that she was "getting contacts" with these women.

She said mechanically, "I'm sure the doctor will be a help to you, Mrs. Ketteridge."

Her own words sounded flat. She felt that she gave nothing; she couldn't give; somehow this girl, and her ailing baby and workless husband, and a further turgid limbo of tired women, and sick children, and men haunted by the perpetual spectre of unemployment, were beyond what she'd conceived as her radiations of comfort.

"Next, please." The vigorous timbre of Sister Cary's voice never abated.

"Mrs. Carter—you next."

She managed her accustomed smile and nod, and added, "I'm glad baby's looking so well. I'm sure the doctor must be pleased," and was rewarded by Mrs. Carter's shuffling, vague smile.

She bent over her list. She glanced up and saw the girl's look bent on her baby's tiny white features—a look of pride mingled with fear.

She began to fill in the card in her clear upright script: "Ketteridge."

Yes, the girl was probably younger than herself. "Husband's occupation: Clerk. Out of work." Probably he was quite young too. Like Geoffrey. The thought of Geoffrey unaccountably hurt her. "Number of rooms: One."

XI

He was sitting under the tree at the end of the narrow flagged garden.

Her step startled him. He dropped his book, and in an irrelevant flash she knew that he hadn't really been

reading. As he rose he bent his glance on her face, trying to reconcile it with the image that had been in his mind; and a difference in the two, something in her present expression, arrested him. He asked:—

"Is anything the matter?"

She sat down on the semicircular stone bench and laid her hat beside her. She felt heavy with perplexity. All the way home she'd been beset by doubts of herself; of the quality of life as she understood it; of her very understanding of life.

"I feel rather low in my mind."

"Darling, I'm so sorry."

She fixed him with an impersonal, troubled glance. Her bus ride home hadn't had its usual zest for her. She was wrapped in the unprecedented confusion of her own thoughts.

"Maybe I'm tired," she said.

She began to realize that she couldn't explain, because she didn't, she felt, understand her own state of mind. She didn't know how to express herself in terms of doubt.

"There's something worrying you, my darling."

The leaf shadows dappled her face and hair; her pose was listless. He wanted to put his arm round her and try to comfort her. But even as she became aware of his intention, she stiffened to the faintest gesture of denial. It seemed to her that there was something insulting almost in his facile offer of consolation.

He lit a cigarette.

He realized that she never meant to hurt. It was clear to him that she was possessed by a bewilderment that she felt to be beyond his comprehension. He knew that she was innocent of any feeling but her own perplexity.

"I suppose," she was saying, "that it's impossible always to be hopeful."

The note of misgiving fell so strangely and pitifully from her lips. The piteousness of a child finding itself unaccountably lost.

The notion of her unhappiness ached through his limbs; and the sense of her deliberate isolation from the help that he longed to give her drove him, almost before he realized the strength and direction of the impulse, to an abrupt question of their whole existence together. Elusive moments of disagreement; intangible crises, beautifully resolved into nothingness; misconceptions charmingly dispersed to irrelevance — were these mere incidents?

"Those women," she said, and paused. A sunbeam percolating through the leaves rippled on her jade necklace. "Sometimes one feels — discouraged."

That was what she managed to come out with — that she was discouraged; and the very expression of her psychological condition seemed to limit and gradually minimize its confusion. She began to see that she'd been momentarily disheartened; allowed herself to be influenced by a particularly strong preception of difficulties. She remembered the fact that progress is often slow, and liable to setbacks. And slowly, like an increasing return of vitality, she was filled with the feeling that "something must be done." It was the old feeling of purpose, instinct with a new urgency. Problems and doubts seemed to fuse and simplify and finally classify themselves into a remediable unity, and in this unity they became a symbol of encouragement.

He saw how a familiar expression of high and zealous pleasure dawned on her features, and his relief at the new tide of her spirit reacted on the dull jarring of his fears and soothed his questioning. Yet he was hardly prepared for her next words.

"You must go right into politics, Geoff."

His look spoke his amazement.

"Yes," she continued, "I'm perfectly sure about that. I see it clearly." Her tone intimated an unquestionable, almost religious, clarity of vision. "It isn't any use," she said, "doing the thing on a small scale, a little helpfulness here and there; doing what we can when an opportunity seems to come along. We have to act." She was uplifted; her words, minted in the sudden fire of her conviction, flowed out in a shining currency of aspiration. "And we have to act immediately, with the purpose of changing the terrible conditions prevalent in the lives of so many of our fellow creatures. It's terrible to me, Geoff, to think of the lives of the women I've been among this afternoon. They need so much. They not only need material comforts, but it's heartbreaking to think of the way they're starved of all the intellectual and idealistic side of life. When you hear them speak it's just a revelation of poverty and absolute lack of enlightenment. It's — a blot on my whole idea of this country. Why, at home we don't have such conditions."

He said, "Your 'colored' quarters? The foreign colonies in your big cities?"

But she swept that aside.

"The majority of our population has a far higher standard, and it seems to me it's the plain duty of free English men and English women to get a government that can set things right, and that men like you, Geoffrey," her gaze was an exhortation, "should be those to answer the call with their own services."

"You mean that you want me to stand for Parliament?"

"Exactly. I feel it's your vocation and your duty. I feel that you should quit this economics business and go right into the real and vital activity that'll help to get the world somewhere."

"Boost the world? Boost progress?"

But she turned on him, and her sweeping seriousness betrayed an exasperation at his tone.

"You know, Geoffrey, that what I'm getting at is terribly true and real and of first-class importance. You've said so yourself. You've told me that you believed that a united, solid, Liberal Party would save England."

"Might — save — "

"And I'm coming to believe that too; and I'm ready to stand by you and to help you all I can." And when, with a gravity as poignant as her own, he was about to interrupt her, she demanded: —

"Do you remember that night when we were coming into Plymouth Harbor, what you said to me about the future of England? Do you remember that you said to me that life in England to-day is a battle — for the future?"

He nodded. He wondered, as she continued her exhortation, — "It's for you to fight, Geoffrey, for you and me to arm ourselves," — just how she would take his revelation of moments when he'd been torn between his passion for her and a passionate regret for an independence he'd meant to devote to that very struggle which she now so romantically featured as a background for triumphs of their mutual public spirit. "It's for us together, Geoffrey." And he realized that she was somehow working it round to her belief in common aspirations and ideals. She was talking of duty. She said, "I feel it's your duty, Geoff," and seemed to wait for him to speak.

He realized that his words must sound trite, prosaic.

"My dear, I can't afford it. After all, what you call 'this economics business' does happen to be my business, as well as my — hobby."

"But Geoff — " She stared. She could n't take this

relation between some salary that he probably earned and this supreme question of his political vocation.

"Politics is expensive," he pointed out. "Even what I earn at the moment — provided I could earn that and carry on a Parliamentary job, which I could n't — would only just cover my living and political expenses as a — a bachelor."

She still stared. "But you don't have to think about that!" she exclaimed. "Why, Geoff, there is n't any question — " Her frown was smoothed out under her realization of the negligible quality of his objection. "Why, my dear!" She could have laughed with relief.

Then, abruptly, she realized that beneath his charming gentle tone he was still objecting.

"Terribly sweet of you, darling. But it would be a little odd if I were to defray my expenses in saving England with the allowance given you by your father."

"But, Geoff, that 's absurd."

"No, my dear; the absurdity would be, so to speak, on the other leg."

"But I don't *see* — " She was appalled, amazed. His point of view was blank to her. It was inconceivable that his objection, attributable only to some obscure form of pride, should frustrate an aim that she 'd already come to look upon as an ideal for their joint activities — an ideal, moreover, which would in its large fulfillment bring them to a higher and more perfect understanding of one another.

With some notion of warding off his objection, she got up, resolving her argument to the remark, thrown out in a manner of delicate and affectionate largesse, that they would discuss it another time. And added, laying her hand on his shoulder, that if they were to be in time for the pre-theatre dinner party, they 'd better dress. But he

was aware, as he followed her into the polished vistas of the hall, that she would n't lightly abandon a purpose that possessed her sense of duty, her vanity, and supremely her imagination.

In their room she dismissed him with the intimation that she was going to lie down and relax for ten minutes. "And will you pull down the blinds, dear, before you go?" she said.

XII

JEREMY perched on the window sill, and Mrs. Thrale stood in the doorway, her arms folded across her comfortable person, her observant little brown eyes and pink mouth fairly agape in her round, pleasantly aging countenance.

"Oh, ma'am!" her gasp had a tinge of reverence.

Mrs. Thrale "did" for them. She had "done" for couples before in the same neighborhood, daily at a pound a week, and an hour or so off in the afternoon to run home to see to her own household. But never before had she been stirred by the sight of a mistress fixing three white ostrich plumes and a diaphanous veil to the circlet of her head; never before had her normal good-natured stoicism been fluttered as she helped with the shoulder fastenings of a train, and then bent to extend its folds upon the carpet. And she was uplifted by the thrill of privilege as she stood feasting her glances upon the details of an array which would so incredibly, and in so short a time, pass before the eyes of Royalty itself.

"Oh *my!*" she could n't help exclaiming. Bobs smiled toward Mrs. Thrale's reflection in the glass.

"It was my wedding dress, you know, Mrs. Thrale, and I've just had the train added on."

Jeremy too was taking in the various details of her costume.

"Will everyone be wearing three feathers?" he asked. He could n't quite get over the queerness of seeing Bobs with feathers on her head, and white gloves up to her shoulders, and that strip of train on the ground. It did n't look a bit like her, somehow; and yet there was something rather fascinating about it. He thought of a word used by his childhood's nurse to denote a certain standard of sartorial tribute to "occasions." "You look so frightfully 'partified,'" he added.

"I feel it. It seems awfully — silly, and yet it 's rather fun in a way, like charades."

Mrs. Thrale ventured: —

"And will you make your curtsy to the King *and* the Queen, ma'am?"

She nodded, and took the white ostrich-feather fan, a survival of her mother's girlhood, out of a drawer.

"I hope I shan't fall over! Athene and I were practising our curtsies all yesterday afternoon." Her color rose under Jeremy's look of questioning yet enchanted admiration. She put a handkerchief in her bag. "We practised in front of the Gauguin in the studio, and Geoff came up and watched us and laughed at us. He said Gauguin would have been pretty surprised to see two of his figures serving as the English Royal Family."

"Oh," said Jeremy vaguely, "you mean that fearful hotchpotch of yellow females doing a sun cure in the jungle, that Athene and Denis and all of them think so first-rate?"

Bobs chuckled, then drew herself up as she recollected her headdress; and Mrs. Thrale broke through her own marveling and preoccupied silence to ask whether Mrs. Ford would be "taking anything" when she came in. And at Bobs's acquiescence in the suggestion of a ther-

mos of "nice 'ot milk," Mrs. Thrale withdrew with the air of one about to prepare a sacramental potion.

When she 'd shut the door, Jeremy asked: —

"You 're sure you feel all right, darling one? You 're quite, *quite* sure it won't — make you feel beastly, or tire you out, or anything?"

She smiled at him. He looked so nice and determinedly businesslike in that dark blue suit; he always went off in it in the mornings, with such an air of promptitude and responsibility. She smiled because she knew that inside his mind he was still so much a guileless little boy.

"Of course not." She could n't help adding, "Anyway, I 'm only doing it because you wanted me to, darling."

It struck her again that it was really, when you came to think of it, a very foolish and indeed, from a reasonable as well as from a practical point of view, a rather culpable thing to do. But he had been so pleased at the idea.

He thought it out. "No," he said, "you did n't altogether, darling. You know you did n't. You remember when I asked you whether you would n't really like to if it was n't because of your principles, — about royalty and snobs and all that sort of thing, — you *did* say it would be rather a joke."

She gave way. "Yes. I know I did." And his next words, "And you know you make me feel as if *I* was being presented to *you* in that get up," utterly disarmed her. She felt herself blushing.

"You make me very silly, Jeremy," she said.

Mrs. Thrale's tightly braided head popped round the door.

"Mrs. Graham's shofa, ma'am, an' 'er ladyship and Mrs. Graham is waitin' below in the car, ma'am."

The front car was drawn up opposite the Palace, heading a queue of equally resplendent cars, which extended the whole length of the Mall toward the Admiralty Arch and then round the corner and down the slope opposite the Horse Guards Parade.

Each car, manned by two liveried chauffeurs, revealed to the June evening a confused bevy of feathered and jeweled whiteness, with the occasional scarlet-and-gold or green-and-gold of a uniform. The crowd, pressing and jostling and thronging to and fro about the motors, feasted upon the intricacies of elegance, upon the qualities of brocades and velvets and satins, the quantity of pearls, the designs of tiaras, the curl of plumes, and the impressive sobriety of knee breeches and of black cocked hats grasped in white-gloved hands.

"There, now, isn't that a beautiful dress? Isn't that embroidery rich-looking?"

A girl urging her friend, as their glances screwed through the window on to Athene's person: "It isn't unlike that one we saw—" They drifted off.

Mary looked at her watch.

"We ought to be moving soon." The evening light caressed the silvered soft waves of her hair and the soft black sheen of her dress.

"Coo-*er!* Look at 'er pearls!"

A small urchin's face, a round little nose flattened against the window; another tousled head bobbing up; a shrewd stare and a nose with a smut on it.

"She don't come up to that last one. Weren't she made up!"

Charles Graham weightily recrossed his knees and grunted. He was cramped, next to Bobs on the small seat.

"Time we were gettin' along." He surveyed his own leg in its black silk stocking, and mild satisfaction showed on his countenance.

Athene kept watching the faces of the crowd. Some had obviously come on purpose to see the carloads; others, in the outer fringes, would be drawn in as though hypnotized. They were a medley, well and ill dressed, but mostly of what she took to be the clerk and shop-girl class, coming along after their work. Quite a lot of elderly women too. Impossible, really, to class people at sight. A shabby woman snatched at the arm of her shuffling husband, and her "Ain't she got a lovely fice, now? Juss like a pictcher!" was shrilly audible in the welter of murmurs and exclamations. Athene realized the woman was staring at her.

Bobs was mentally and morally uncomfortable. She kept peering through the window to spy whether the cars farther forward showed any movement. She borrowed a sheet of the evening paper from her father and then discarded it on to the floor. She became obsessed with an element of futility and insolence in the situation: mother and Athene and father and herself all displayed like a wedding cake in a shop window. And the perception that the crowd was impressed and fascinated, rather than contemptuous and resentful of the spectacle, sentimentally affected rather than intellectually disaffected, roused all her latent questioning of an order in which the poor could still be-glamour their imaginations with the pomp and circumstance of the rich. She marveled at the ramifications of human snobbery; it was like a cancer, in the very blood of the social system. She said as much, with a sharp fierce distaste. "All their staring is just inverted snobbism," she pronounced. Her head felt hot, and she had an elusive sensation of giddiness.

Her mother disagreed. "I think it's something much nicer and much more elemental in people. I believe when human beings won't pause any more to cheer kings and queens, and gaze at gorgeous processions, then human

children will have stopped liking fairy tales, and the world will be all too dreadfully sensible and prosaic."

"Well, we certainly don't have such things in America."

"Oh, you take it out in movie stars — they have the necessary glamour." Bobs's level brows were drawn together. Athene was so obviously enjoying it all, even these preliminaries; it was n't logical, when she was always talking about democracy; and then, only yesterday, about how she meant to get Geoffrey to stand, to "improve conditions."

The procession of cars began to move forward at walking pace.

"Now," Charles Graham squared his shoulders, "we 're beginning to move."

Bobs wondered whether Athene really minded what party Geoff stood for; it seemed much more the notion of activity and proselytizing and getting results which excited her so much.

"Hello! Hello! Hello!"

They all turned.

"Heavens — it 's Clifford!"

A taxi had drawn up on the opposite side of the Mall, and Clifford was pushing his way toward them. He was carrying an opera hat.

"Thought I 'd see if you were still queuing up." He regarded each in turn with considerable appreciation. "Just on my way to dine. Got Veronique over there in the taxi — going on to dance somewhere afterward. Veronique 's a member of that new place, the Vortex."

"That 's the place Denis was telling me about, where they have a revolving floor, is n't it?"

"Yes."

Athene did n't add that she was going there with Denis the following evening. She suspected that Mary, though

she'd never touched on and in fact avoided the subject, condemned her friendship with Denis. Geoffrey's attitude she could understand; she'd forgiven him a naïveté inevitable in what she chose to explain to herself as "his kind of feeling" for her. But it seemed to her unworthy of Mary's judgment that she too should crudely misinterpret a relation which, though subtle and perhaps — in a sensual and selfish world — unusual, should be clear to a high-minded and intelligent woman; and it seemed to her as if her mother-in-law's uneventful family life had in some way narrowed her view.

"Well, enjoy yourselves. Father, you do look — what's the word? — august!" He dashed off in high spirits.

Gradually the car reached the top of the Mall; now they passed the great gates, policemen keeping back the crowd on either side. Now, through an archway, they drew up in an inner courtyard, stepping on to red carpet. Now they were in the high-pillared entrance hall: red carpets, immense gilt-framed portraits, gilt mirrors, tables with marble tops and gilt carved legs, red velvet upholstery.

They moved with the throng up the wide staircase, whose summit was flanked by two immense and apparently immovable Beefeaters in ruffs and scarlet doublet and hose.

They moved through an infinite vista of enormous rooms, ornate with gilt mirrors and marble tables and gilt chairs and red velvet sofas; and each doorway was flanked by Beefeaters.

They came to a high, white-paneled room; rows of gilt chairs arrayed on the parquet floor as if for a concert. The front rows were filled, the women's heads effecting a parterre of snowy plumes misted about with white tulle. They filed into their appointed chairs and

sat down. Athene's head was tilted up as though she were breathing mountain air.

A gentleman in a scarlet uniform rose and requested the company not to talk loudly. "It would be better," he added, "not to talk at all."

There was a hush. Bobs felt as if she were back at school. She heard somebody whisper that the diplomatic corps had begun to go in. In the distance a string band was playing a waltz, lilting and gay and dreamy. It made Mary feel as if she were eighteen again; it caught her queerly by the throat. Charles Graham's chest seemed to have swelled out, and his buttons glinted; his features glowed with a blend of loyalty and importance.

Their turn came to rise and move in a procession out of the room, along a wide corridor. Bobs had seen her own face in a mirror, looking greenish. They moved gradually nearer and nearer the music, nearer and nearer the doorway. Athene's grasp tightened on her card; only three more in front of them now. Already she had a glimpse of serried uniforms. Now Mary was next — in the doorway, handing her card, her train being arranged behind her by two officials. A path of red carpet passing before steeply massed, brilliant, glittering ranks — military, naval, diplomatic. Like an angelic choir in uniforms, Bobs thought; and saw Athene's train arranged; saw Athene walk forward, her head high. Someone took her card; she saw it handed up through the choir to a being who stood by the central thrones and proclaimed. She heard the resonant tones: "Lady Graham." She saw her mother's shoulders sink.

On the right a confused distance of parquet and more choirs, silent choirs of ladies in waiting, and the band. The music was stronger and gayer, its lilt more and more irresistible. Bobs felt she had stepped into a pageant. Her resentment had gone, her sense of elaborate absurd-

ity was overwhelmed. The pageant was gorgeous, magnificent, moving, in its slow ceremonial.

"Mrs. Geoffrey Graham."

Now Athene was curtsying, sweeping down, her head inclined.

"Mrs. Jeremy Ford."

She curtsied twice. Over the shoulder of the first Royal Personage Bobs saw a podgy face familiar in *Punch* cartoons, unfamiliarly topping a scarlet coat. It gave her a shock; it was like meeting Achilles at a "first night." She made her second curtsy. Again that faint sense of nausea.

Athene was waiting for her beyond the farther door.

"Well, isn't that just gor*geous!* It gives me the most wonderful feeling. And what a spectacle! I didn't expect it to be so solemn, and so— Well, it fairly gets you," she broke off.

The crowd thickened as débutantes and dowagers filed through from the Throne Room and resolved themselves into discursive groups. Three girls in white, carrying bouquets of lilies of the valley and roses, stood together by a sallow older woman whose red satin dress, cut in the fashion of the nineties, was bedecked with a quantity of old-fashioned jewelry. The girls had the eyes and complexions of children; they were something, Athene thought, that you wouldn't find in America—their look of being at the same time so self-possessed and so unsophisticated, so exquisitely dressed, yet innocent of cosmetics. Their type had freshness and enchantment—a type, she reflected, that even in England must be dying out. They seemed to belong to the epoch of their chaperone's red dress.

When the procession from the Throne Room had passed through and they went in to supper, Bobs had disappeared.

"Sure to turn up in the crush," said her father, and began to fight his way toward the buffet to forage for his womenfolk in a crowd which seethed and struggled with sudden appetite. Youthful beauties retired into corners to gobble hardly gained ices; dowagers in full panoply gasped and fought for champagne; and mothers and daughters, a quarter of an hour earlier united by ceremonial loyalty, parted company in their search for sandwiches.

Athene was catechizing her father-in-law upon the mysteries and medals when Bobs reappeared, looking pale but serene. She said:—

"This is a very difficult place when one feels sick."

Athene turned.

"Why, I'd no idea you were feeling badly, dear," and Bobs found herself led to one of the scarce and much disputed chairs.

"You sit right down here while I get you some brandy."

Bobs sank down. She felt she had been walking for miles. Athene miraculously returned with a glass of brandy. She made her drink it.

"I suppose it's that infant of yours?"

Bobs nodded. Athene took the empty glass from her and put it down on the stand of a marble bust.

"Now," she announced, "I'll get Mother, and we'll take you home right away."

And when they were all finally installed in the car, Athene, who had insisted on Bobs sitting beside her mother, turned to her father-in-law.

"Then the Order of the Bath is not a military award?"

The lights were strung down the darkness of the Mall, an alternation of rosy pearls and yellow pearls.

Bobs said:—

"Mother, I kept being reminded of Mr. Daddy Long-legs and Mr. Floppy Fly. D'you remember —

> "And if you came you'd see such sights,
> Such rugs and jugs and candle lights,
> And more than all the King and Queen,
> One in red and one in green."

Mary laughed.

Athene paused in evident surprise.

"What a queer thing!" She seemed to wait for a lead.

"It's the Lear nonsense rhymes," Mary said.

"Such rugs and jugs and candle lights," murmured Bobs.

But Athene was nonplussed only for a moment. She turned again to her father-in-law. "And the Distinguished Service Order?" she asked.

PART FOUR

I

[*From Mary Graham to Patricia Graham, in New York*]

YOXALLS, NR. MELBURY
Christmas Day, 1925

DEAREST PATRICIA,—

Your letter came this morning by the Christmas mail, also your cable with Christmas wishes to us all. Sweet of you to send it, and we divided the spoils, giving some to Achilles even!

Bobs has brought him down here for Christmas, looking very dirty after his London life. Most unsuitable for him, but they *will* have him! I'm afraid his nose will be put out of joint rather when the baby arrives next month.

It is lovely to hear all your news and that your "show" is being such a success. Is it January that you go to Chicago? The cuttings you sent are very amusing and we all laughed over the "Young English Sculptress Says American Girls Have More Pep!" I wonder what you really said. And do all reporters over there ask all visitors to comment on the "differences"?

What an enchanting family the Elcotts must be! I think, and my father said it too, that there are no people in the world more delightful than the really nice Americans. I love to think of your spending Christmas with them. Mrs. Elcott wrote me such a charming letter about you and recalled my last meeting with her in Biarritz years ago. I haven't met him, but I believe he's very clever. I'm so glad we've kept up. It will be lovely to hear of your visit to Washington, and interesting to hear what you say of the Reids.

Athene and Geoffrey are here too, though only for a few days, as they go on to the Blandons for New Year. As I told you in my last letter, she is hand in glove with Lady B. and involves Geoff as much as possible in that *galèré* in spite of his opinion that they are the wrong sort of Liberals. Athene never lets him alone about a political career, though he's told her he can't afford it, and he's dreadfully distressed between this feeling and the feeling that he's mak-

ing her unhappy. It's all rather dreadful, isn't it? I suppose she really does feel she's right. The same thing applies to the way she indulges in this friendship with Denis Mortlake. She won't look facts in the face, or, if she does, she seems to look over their heads. I don't know what'll happen. Geoffrey looks worn out, and his nerves are on edge. And she's feeling some sort of strain too — one can feel a perpetual tension between them. And it's only a year since they came here newly married.

Your father is well and has bought a hunter from the Brocks, which he is delighted with. Clifford is in high spirits and tells me that he and Veronique have decided to marry each other eventually, — after he leaves Oxford, — but that meanwhile they aren't committing themselves to anything definite. Clifford says, "Veronique and I don't mean to rush into things, as we think marriage is too important for that." I find it very difficult to take it seriously, but meanwhile they are very happy dancing and playing tennis and riding together, and he is having her up to Oxford for Commem. this summer. She is really quite a sweet creature, and seems quiet and level-headed. I wonder whether there isn't quite a lot to be said for these *mariages de sports*, as theirs would be, and as quite a lot of successful modern marriages are. In a way, athletic interests in common have a lot to be said for them — as opposed to intellectual and spiritual "affinities," I mean.

According to Clifford, Veronique's brother Alfred, however, has given up tennis for Communism, has renounced all claim to his father's money, and has thrown up the University and apparently taken on some sort of "agitator's" job, I believe. It seems a pity, as he was certain of a First. Clifford says it is "betraying your class," but I rather admire the boy, though I feel it's terribly hard on his parents.

Bless you, darling! I feel so glad that you are interested and occupied, though of course it's horrid to have you so far away. I can't help envying you your freedom a little bit. I don't believe that you young people realize what a real and splendid thing your freedom is, even compared to my generation. Of course, like all liberty that's got rather quickly, it is often used irresponsibly, which is why silly people say the modern girl has too much freedom, when what

is really the matter is that a great many individuals lack self-discipline. But that is no reason why those who are able to profit by emancipation should n't have it. You might as well say that intelligent people should n't vote because stupid ones vote stupidly. I was thinking yesterday, when Athene was talking about how her time is taken up with all her activities, that really women are still rather conscious of their new opportunities; I mean, it is still talked about and discussed in the papers. Probably the next generation of girls will take it all so much as a matter of course that there won't be any artificial problem between a "career" and more domestic interests, and they 'll adjust their individual tastes and individual circumstances to either, or to a reasonable and practical combination of both.

Bless you again, and very, very much love to you from us all.

[*From Patricia Graham to Mary Graham*]

PENNSYLVANIA AVENUE
WASHINGTON, D. C.
January 5, 1926

MOTHER DARLING, —

Your Xmas Day letter just came, forwarded from the Elcotts. It really was enchanting there; such a large, jolly family, and the house packed with nephews and nieces and cousins, and all immensely devoted to each other. Mr. Elcott is less like a Wall Street magnate than anything I could have imagined — smallish, with poetical brown eyes, and a delicious sense of humor, and a smile that makes you feel warm and happy all over. He is usually late for dinner, as he sings operatic music in his bath, and then comes down rather dreamy and apologetic and sometimes without his tie. Often he practises the violin — he has seven exquisite ones — while Mrs. Elcott is trying to write letters. But she does n't seem to mind a bit. I am going back to them for a time before I go on to Chicago.

I arrived here two days ago. The Langtons wanted me to stay with them, but I refused, as Betty has one of the children down with measles, and visitors, even cousins, are a nuisance, and I accepted Mrs. Reid's invitation here. They are very kind and hospitable, and the house is a Babbitt's

dream of luxury and efficiency and the very highest-class decorative effects. Of course we talk mostly about Athene, and all my news in relation to Athene, and Mrs. R. keeps trying to make me explain to her the exact quality of Athene's social status, and catechizes me to name Athene's visiting list. She is delighted with the photo of Athene she cut out of *Mayfair*, with the caption, "A New and Popular Young Hostess."

Mr. Reid seems preoccupied, and she keeps on urging him to take a rest cure. I know Athene was worried about him last summer, and certainly he doesn't look well, in spite of a gentleman who comes at 7 A.M. to "exercise" him every morning. I think if you saw them you would feel Athene was explained a little more. I should think her mania about the importance of intellectual things is an extreme reaction against the conventionality and bathos of her parents; and all her fever about public work is rather creditable when you hear her mother say that "people of good family don't mix themselves up with politics here." Of course she (Athene) doesn't see things in proportion, but then, most really rich people only have their own special kind of sense of proportion, and that's hopelessly at variance with the majority. Only of course it is heartbreaking that Geoff should be suffering the consequences of Athene's heredity and environment. I've never quite made out from the beginning whether it was only that he was carried away by her looks and her immensely charming manner, or whether he's realized something much more important in her, which I do believe is there if it could only get shaken up to the surface.

I do so feel that the English Speaking Union ought to get on, and I do believe that the Americans have potentially enough in common to make a most invigorating relation. But other times one feels with them that East is East and West is West, and it's no conceivable use their trying to meet.

Human relations *are* a muddle! And they don't seem only to be a static tangle, but a tangle with which a kitten called Fate plays all the time. A reporter from the *Washington News* has just appeared, so love and a kiss.

PATRICIA

[*Patricia Graham to John Napier*]

WASHINGTON

MY DEAR:—

We must stand by our agreement. Don't make it more difficult than it is by writing me such a letter. Nothing would be easier than for me to say, "Yes, come out here and we 'll go West and begin our life romantically together." But we, and you particularly, have other things at stake; and if we do decide that our love for each other is worth everything else, then we must be open about it from the beginning, and explain it all to your wife and to my family. Life grows round one with living fibres, and one need n't be unnecessarily ruthless in tearing them away. When I come back in May, then we will make the decision. I wonder if you realize what it 'll actually mean. It is so easy to *say*, "The world well lost." I wonder if you *see*, my dear?

II

THE mists drifted apart.

Bobs saw the nurse's white veil; the nurse and the doctor facing each other over the end of the bed. They had been saying something, but she did n't know what; their words had been absorbed in those great warm mists.

A startling idea came to her.

"Is the baby here?"

She saw the doctor's face turn and look down at her.

"Yes. In the next room—a boy," he added.

She remembered that she had wanted it to be a boy. But she began to realize that she was too tired even to be pleased. The mists threatened to close down again.

"Is—the baby—all right?" she asked.

The nurse's soft Irish voice:—

"Very well. Eight pounds."

It occurred to her that the blankets were touching her shoulders. A lot of blankets. They had taken the sheets

away. Then she realized that she had stockings on, woolen stockings. The room was only lit by the bedside lamp.

The doctor was saying, "Well, I shall come in to-morrow, nurse, about four o'clock."

Suddenly she was possessed by the need to ask a lot of questions:—

"Did he cry? Has Jeremy seen him yet? Is Mother still here?"

They blanketed her speech with their reassurance, and she saw that they were afraid of her exciting herself. She gave in to their notions, and lay still. The room was hot. Her fatigue seemed to be clamping her to the bed.

The doctor went away. The nurse said, "Your husband's coming up in a minute. I expect," she added, "you'd like to titivate."

She brought a comb and held the hand mirror. Bobs managed to grasp the comb. She saw her own face, looking damp and drowsy and faintly surprised. She willed herself to keep her hand up, and hold the comb, and push it through her hair. When she'd done it, she felt as if she would never be able to lift her arm again.

She began to recollect.

"Did the specialist go before I came round?"

"Yes. As soon as it was all over. He had another case."

There pricked through her thoughts an apprehension —specialists' fees. But she was too tired to think it out. The nurse went into the next room.

She was conscious of an extraordinary stillness, like the stillness after a storm; already the storm was far off, unreal.

Queer, that such agony could seem so irrelevant.

There was a faint knocking at the door.

The door opened. She willed herself to turn her head. She saw him coming toward her in the shaded light.

"Darling!" she said.

He bent over her.

The baby was n't ugly, as she 'd expected. She had a vision of the nurse bringing it in to them, pausing in the doorway. A small, softly pink countenance, enlivened by dark, widely opened eyes, a mass of white shawl. It was brought near. It had eyelashes, and brown fluffy hair even on the tips of its ears. It clasped and unclasped its fingers with frenzied energy. Its eyes never blinked.

"It 's — rather sweet," she said.

Jeremy seemed both entranced and disconcerted.

"It really *is* rather sweet," Bobs repeated.

"Of course he 's sweet," said the nurse.

III

"Only ten minutes to-day, Mrs. Graham. The doctor does n't want Mrs. Ford to have many visitors yet, and her mother 's been in already this afternoon."

Athene accepted the pretty nurse's instructions.

"I can't stay long anyway. I have the car ordered back at twenty past four."

The nurse opened the door.

"Here 's Mrs. Graham."

Bobs was sitting up against her pillows, looking, Athene thought, about ten years old. Her bobbed fair hair and straight fringe had grown during her fortnight in bed, emphasizing the youthful air of her slim neck and honest, unwavering gaze.

"I *am* glad to see you, Athene!" The freshness of Bobs's tones was an intimation that they had never been

adapted to any insincerity. "And *oh!*" She unwrapped the paper from an immense bunch of pink rosebuds that Athene laid on the bed. "Oh, how simply *too* lovely!" She buried her face in them. "That is fearfully sweet of you, Athene." She raised her face to give Athene a kiss.

"I brought another little something as well." Athene laid down a cardboard box. "You can unpack it while I have a look at what you've got in that cot over there."

Bobs smiled in the direction of the cradle while her fingers were already untying the string of the box.

"I think he's asleep," she said, "as usual. Jeremy and I think he sleeps almost too much. We never see his eyes, which are the nicest things about him — all dark and misty like a kitten's."

Athene bent to survey the peaceful small creature. Its skin was like an anemone, the cheeks shadowed by the long lashes; the mouth was a little open; the tiny nostrils moved minutely with its breathing.

"Isn't he just *adorable?* He really is! I'd no idea a baby this age could look so enchanting!"

The fingers curled more closely into the small palms; from the depths of his rosy, frilly-curtained cot emanated an indescribably soft, endearing fragrance.

"He *is* sweet," Athene brooded. She had a longing to stroke his delicious little head, and pick him up, and hold him in her arms.

"Oh!" Bobs cried. "But how — oh, Athene!"

She had thrown off the last piece of tissue paper and held up a madonna-blue wrapper.

"Oh, my dear, how sweet of you!"

Athene was touched by her rapture.

"I'm awfully glad you like it. I had it copied from that pink one of mine that you admired so much when I first came to Yoxalls."

"Oh, but it *is* so soft and luscious and pretty — oh, do get me my hand glass!"

She laid it round her shoulders, slipped her arms into the sleeves. She surveyed herself, and wriggled gently with delight.

"The swansdown feels so lovely. I'd always wanted — I wonder when Jeremy'll be in."

"It makes your eyes look quite 'bluey.'"

The nurse looked in.

"You must n't have Mrs. Graham much longer, you know. Oh, is n't that pretty?" She came in, and felt the stuff, and looked at her patient with an affectionate merriment. "You *do* look smart. The doctor'll think you're better than ever when he sees you in that." She turned to Athene, who was leaning over the cradle again. "Well, what d'you think of your nephew, Mrs. Graham?"

Athene dragged her gaze away from the baby.

"I — I think he's lovely, nurse. Lovely," she added softly, looking down at him again.

"Indeed he is — a lovely baby."

She went back into the adjoining room.

"And now," Athene said, with an abrupt consciousness of time, "I've got to fly off." She came up to the bedside.

"I have to go in and see that poor Mrs. Ketteridge I've told you of, Bobs — that girl whose husband was a clerk at Bickerstaff's and was out of work."

Bobs nodded. "I remember. And then he got another job just before Christmas, did n't he? I remember your telling me."

"That's it. Awfully nice kind of — refined people: absolutely struggling to keep up a decent standard, and keep their child really clean, and all that. And now he's lost his job again, — the people he was with put in one

of their own relations, I think, — and they're in absolute despair."

"I *am* sorry." Bobs put down the hand glass. Her look was as troubled as Athene's. "I *am* sorry!" Her serious gray eyes filled with tears. "I — I wish we could do something. Only really, it's all we can do ourselves — " She checked herself and looked up at her sister-in-law. "We're jolly lucky, you know, that Jeremy's got this fairly good job at Maltby's; otherwise we'd be pretty well down and out. There aren't jobs for anyone for the asking now." She made herself dismiss a personal preoccupation, voicing a part of the mental process. "It's so easy," she said, "when you're married, to — to be sort of selfish, only considering everything from the angle of your own little family. And when," she added simply, "you're so happy, it's so dreadfully easy to forget about other people who aren't." And then she blushed with a consciousness of having betrayed so intimate a feeling.

Athene kissed her.

And as Athene went out, sped by Mrs. Thrale in an unusually clean apron, and descended the stone staircase of the building, she retained a picture of Bobs sitting up in her blue wrapper, and of the white, pretty little room, and the cradle in the corner. And it seemed to her that the air of the late afternoon was more than usually raw and depressing; and as she got into the car she shivered, as though a misty unhappiness had breathed on her spirit.

"Mrs. Graham is beautifully turned out," said the nurse. She was collecting and folding up the tissue paper.

"Mm. Isn't she?"

"She got a family of her own? I suppose she has."

"No."

"Oh! Poor thing! How sad."

Bobs's fingers smoothed the swansdown.

"She doesn't want any."

"What? She?"

"No. She does a lot of public work and all that sort of thing."

The nurse's pretty Irish voice assumed an inflection of shrewdness:—

"She wants them," she said, "even if she thinks she doesn't. Why, just now, you'd only to look at her face."

IV

GEOFFREY thought, "She has something on her mind." While they conversed, he was watching her across the table.

The shaded candles infused the atmosphere between them with an unusual mellowness, a quiet in which their words rose and dived spasmodically, like fish in a pool. But it seemed to him that her words were phosphorescent and meant nothing; and that the inner light of her mind was withdrawn.

As they rose to go upstairs, he said:—

"Do you know that this is the first time we've dined at home together for an immensely long time?"

"Why, yes, I suppose it is." She preceded him up the staircase, and he thought how lovely her hair looked, knotted in the nape of her neck above the double row of pearls. Patricia had caught that in the bust of her. He glanced at the bust as they entered the drawing-room; set there, in the corner, its silvery *patine* gave to the whole head a peculiar accentuation of the ethereal. When he came over to where she stood with one foot resting on the fender, she said, with an effect of being troubled by his last remark, that they had, after all, been busy lately.

"I didn't mean to reproach you." He lit her cigarette. He was aware that she was in some way affected by him, and almost — he saw how her look softened — toward him. He moved away from her and settled himself in an armchair, and lit his own cigarette with a prolonged, nervous deliberation.

"No, I know, dear; but still," she hesitated, "well, of course we haven't seen one another a great deal lately. And there's something" she went on, "that I've wanted to talk to you about lately."

It touched him with a stab of hope that possibly — and yet he shrank from the possibility as too suddenly and unbearably sweet — she was about to speak of their unspoken differences; to confess her sense of how terribly they'd grown apart, and to offer him a revelation whose beauty might exorcise the dread that he could neither face nor dispel, the dread that she actually and essentially didn't care.

Her words chilled him with relief.

"It's about the Mrs. Ketteridge I told you of — that girl who's been coming to the clinic and who's married to a young clerk." She went on to narrate the young man's loss of his last job.

"Yes," he said. Then had her look just now meant nothing? A mere illusion of his own? Yet in her whole poise and tone he still felt that hint of gentleness.

"I want you to do something for them, Geoff."

"Of course, darling — if I can."

She sat down on the arm of the chair opposite him; there was something spontaneous and schoolgirlish in the attitude. In an impulse of affection, he saw her sophistication as a rather magnificent piece of make-believe.

"I went in to see Mrs. Ketteridge after I'd been to see Bobs this afternoon. The baby's been sick again lately, and she looked just fit to die, herself. He was

there too, and they were just sitting around as if they had n't the heart to do anything at all. He says he 's tried every place to get a job. He 's tramped half London, and been to every big store, and answered every kind of advertisement, and the Labor Exchange can't do anything for him either."

"He 's getting the dole?"

"Yes, but that is n't enough in this district for them to get along on except by pretty nearly starving. She 's awfully run down and has to have a tonic, and the baby needs good milk now every day, and with their food and room and gas, without even reckoning clothes, and coal — "

"Did she earn before she was married?"

"Yes. She told me she used to be in some big millinery shop; but her health would n't stand the work now, even if there was n't the baby to complicate things." She broke off: "You *must* do something for them, Geoff! It 's too terrible to think of them."

"I wish to goodness I could. But what do you propose? If you start keeping one unemployed family you ought to be keeping them all."

"No." She swept his words aside. "What I want you to do, dear, is perfectly simple"; she faced him with an air of both making allowances for his lapse and at the same time trusting to his essential understanding. "I want you to see that he gets some kind of a clerkship or porter's job or something at the School of Economics."

He hesitated. He realized how highly she was keyed by her purpose; he realized that it was this purpose that had held her thoughts at dinner.

"My dear," he said, "I can't do that."

She would n't accept it. "Why not? Why ever not? It would be so easy."

"But any jobs there that this young man could take

are already filled. Even if my recommendation were to carry weight — which it obviously does n't — and get him a job there, then someone else would have to be turned out."

He saw the glow fade from her expression.

"Ye-es." She eyed him with visible chagrin. "That seems terribly inhuman, Geoffrey. I 'm certain, if you wanted to — "

He saw how quickly her mental view veered back from an acknowledgment of the facts of the case, as he 'd presented them to her, to the renewed influence of her personal sympathies, and it was with an involuntary curtness that he remarked: —

"The whole problem is so much a general and fundamental one, my dear, that it 's impossible to try to mitigate it in particular aspects like this. It 's primarily a general economic problem."

"But when it 's a question of human lives and human happiness," she protested, showing him a determination to try to touch his feelings through his reason. "You have to look at it that way, dear. You can't just think of every sociological problem from the economic side."

"But human lives and human happiness are so largely a matter of economics: a case like this, like the Ketteridges, is entirely an economic question. Don't you see, darling?" He overrode her protest. "You tell me that their trouble is entirely due to the fact that Ketteridge is unemployed. You want me to find him a job even at the expense of another man, whose family might suffer just as much."

"I did n't say — You might *make* him — "

"You can't 'make' jobs — an economic limitation again. Ketteridge is one of the thousands of cases, — an instance in the whole problem of unemployment, — and the remedy must go as deep as the causes. Ket-

teridge and his wife are suffering, first, for the inevitable trade dislocation of the War, and secondly, to my mind, for the monetary policy of a government who've made unemployment ten times worse by reëstablishing the gold standard."

"That's ridiculous, dear. Why won't you face the human side of it? It's simply that he can't get work. It doesn't have anything to do with the gold standard."

He got up and began to walk about.

"On the contrary. The actual increase of unemployment is directly due to it, because the foreign demand for our goods has been immensely influenced by this policy. The statistics bear this out. The policy of improving our exchange by about ten per cent involves a reduction of ten per cent in the sterling receipts of our industries. It means that whenever we sell anything abroad either the foreign buyer has to pay ten per cent more in his money, or we have to accept ten per cent less in our money. These conditions are enough to ruin our weaker industries, and most effectually check any improvement in the whole of our foreign trade."

She was struck by his fervid tone, though the matter of his sentences skimmed the surface of her intelligence, leaving just enough impression to enable her to make the relevant exclamation that, if this were so, why should the government hold by so mistaken a policy?

"Because conventional finance has its prejudices about a 'sound' policy of the Bank of England and the excellent result that must follow automatically from such a policy; and neither the politicians nor the City will admit that the obvious result, in this case, has been exactly contrary to their theories, which made no allowances for our actual post-war conditions."

"Well, then," she came out with, "if this is your way of answering me about the Ketteridges, and if you see

it this way, as just a part of the whole problem, then surely" — she appealed with an air of supreme and subtly triumphant logic — "you must feel that you ought to *act?* Surely if you have these convictions you must want to put them into practice? When I said to you last summer — d' you remember that evening when I came back from the clinic? — that it *was n't* any use just dealing with particular cases, and that you should take up public questions actively, you would n't listen to me. And now, when I come to you with the idea that at least you 'll coöperate with me in helping this one family, then you come along with all this talk about general causes. It almost seems to me," the words escaped her with an implication of bitterness, "that you don't really care either way, and that all you really care about is theories."

"Which all comes back to the fact that you won't be happy till you see me on the hustings?"

"I 'd always imagined you wanted to; you used to talk —"

"You make no allowance for my possibly still wanting to."

"But then — ?"

"I 've told you. I don't feel justified. If I give up my lecturing and writing, I should have almost no income of my own. This means that we should both be living on a voluntary allowance given you by your father. Supposing that were to stop for any reason —"

"It never would."

"It 's very unlikely. But you never know. If it did, we should have nothing. That is, from our private point of view."

"But it 's so absolutely unlikely, dear. And I 'd always thought that maybe my — my allowance would be helpful to you. Look at the Elvastons, and the Cheshams."

"But, dear, don't you see? Roddy Elvaston and Frank Chesham both look upon politics as a kind of sport in which they want to — get into the finals, so to speak. They 've both married American women with money, and their wives join in the game and more or less make the game possible, and develop the social side of it. But I don't look upon politics as a game; and neither do you. If and when I go into it, it 'll be too vital and too important to me to take it up as a kind of hobby one can easily dispose of. And that 's very largely why I must feel assured that I can carry through on my own, and not through your father's liberality."

"That kind of pride seems to me altogether false, Geoffrey."

"I 'm sorry. You must accept it, all the same."

She said: "It seems as if you did n't trust me — as if I were a stranger you did n't care to feel obliged to." He repeated obstinately: "I 'm sorry."

"It 's all," she broke out, "a part of the way you treat me; just as if — as if I 'd no real part in your life at all. You scarcely speak to me of your life and your work. You never tell me just what you 're doing and what you 're thinking. You never even show me your writing, or discuss your thoughts with me. We don't seem to share. Why, even Denis speaks with me about his work."

Her sentences broke against him in sharp reverberating shocks. He could n't answer.

"It is n't what I believed our life would be. It seemed to me our life — "

"Our life!" he broke in, and his tone startled her by its violence. "My life! I suppose," he said, "that you only married me for — for what you imagined to be my life?" The sight of her sitting there, the firelight playing over her hair and neck and shoulders and over the

sheen of her dress, held an acrid, sudden beauty. "While I married you because I loved you."

His words died out.

They were silent; and as the seconds passed, their silence seemed to freeze their spirits into its crystalline substance. Neither knew what the other was thinking or feeling. They might have been dead to one another.

Finally her words had a splintering irrelevance.

"It doesn't seem to me it's any use arguing."

She got up and switched on the radio. ". . . A depression moving westward over the British Isles is likely to cause further storms. Some local fog is expected. . . ."

V

Mary ascended the steps to the yellow door flanked by the two orange trees in their yellow tubs. Every time she came to the house this scenic effect struck her, first as rather attractive, and secondly as rather silly. But lately Athene had talked of having the door painted magenta, since magenta was fashionable again.

Mrs. Graham, Blundell informed her, had left a message that she would be back as soon after four as possible. Mary went up to the drawing-room. Would her ladyship have tea now, Blundell asked.

She preferred to wait.

On the round lacquer table by the fireplace were arranged papers and pamphlets and periodicals. The *New Statesman*, the *Spectator*, the *Workers' Weekly*, the *Times*, and two days' copies of the *Westminster Gazette;* the solid brightness of the *Atlantic Monthly* and the *London Mercury;* the khaki of the *Round Table*, the spinach hue of the *Hibbert Journal*, a pamphlet on the white-slave traffic, and several Blue Books. On one of the chairs lay

a copy of the *Times Literary Supplement,* opened at the page of novel reviews.

Mary picked it up. There was a review of a book of short stories by Denis Mortlake. She began to read.

"This collection, *The Cruel Month,* by Denis Mortlake (Danby, 7/6 net), like some of Mr. Mortlake's previous work, is in danger of being stultified in a persuasive, and somewhat facile, atmosphere of pessimism. . . . "

"Mother *dear!*"

Athene sparkled good nature and haste. "I'm just terribly sorry to keep you waiting."

Mary felt herself irritated by the fresh, dutiful kiss.

"One of those blocks in Piccadilly, and I thought I never would get here. I think your traffic system is the most wonderfully casual sort of an arrangement."

Her talk rippled on as she rang for tea and then took off her gloves and coat.

"Now sit down there, Mother, by the fire. I see," she exclaimed, on just too bland a note, "you've been reading that review of Denis's book."

"Yes. It doesn't seem entirely favorable."

"Why, I thought it was pretty good, especially in that last part where it speaks about his style."

"Yes. But then it concludes by saying that his style is rather 'much ado about nothing.'"

Athene came out pat with "Oh, that's only because the reviewers are like so many people — they don't like his point of view."

"But do you?" Mary asked; and for a second Athene was disconcerted by her glance. Then she answered: —

"I think I understand it — We shall want some more logs, Blundell." She poured out a cup of tea. "I use n't to," she remarked. "It's only lately that I have begun to have a really true impression." She handed Mary the cup of tea. "And what I've come to feel

about Denis is," she earnestly continued, "that he is here to interpret, as an artist, those aspects of life which ought to be fully understood if they are to be remedied."

"Yes," said Mary. "Yes." She thought, "Sometimes you are really too idiotic."

"And an artist, a great artist, can make great art out of sorrow just the way he can make it out of joy."

"I should have thought," said Mary, "that the point about an artist is that he can make art out of things that seem to most of us to be commonplace. Denis can never be a good artist, because he has the opposite quality; he finds almost everything boring or futile, instead of finding the whole stuff of life exciting and interesting. I think," Mary added with an asperity that surprised her daughter-in-law, "that he is clever, but I find him rather boring. He is never spontaneous, and he's such an egoist that it's quite depressing to be in the same room with him; it presses on one like unhealthy atmosphere."

Athene just perceptibly shook her head. She spoke with uplifted mildness:—

"He needs a terrible lot of understanding. More tea, Mother?"

"Thank you." Suddenly Mary was aware that her temper was threatening to break up through the surface of her composure. She changed the subject.

"I lunched with Bobs to-day," she said.

"You did?"

Athene's rejoinder was mechanical. She was conscious that lately a faint and unspoken hostility had more and more haunted Mary's feeling for her. She had vaguely known—and vaguely ignored the knowledge—that, in Mary's mind, whatever was wrong between herself and Geoffrey was n't Geoffrey's fault; and she had casually made allowances for the maternal instinct. But now, facing Geoffrey's mother across the tea table,

she had the sense of coming up against an element in Mary that she'd never suspected — a hard, dangerous element lying deep in the sensitive strata of her character. She suddenly perceived Mary as potentially relentless.

"The baby," Mary said, "was looking too sweet. He's just beginning to kick and take notice. They're both quite wrapped up in him."

"I suppose he would be. He must be getting on for two months now." Athene hesitated, and then continued with mild thoughtfulness which overspread, though it didn't quite obscure, her awareness of Mary's mood. "And yet, you know, Mother, I can't help wondering if she isn't being wasted. Geoff and I were there about a fortnight ago, and I said to Geoffrey when we were driving home that Bobs seems somehow to be" — the penciled brows were drawn together — "deteriorating intellectually. They did nothing but talk about the infant and his weight and the way he behaves, or else about Achilles and what he thinks about the infant, and it did seem to me —"

"Bobs seems to me to be both happier and more useful than she's ever been in her life."

Athene faintly started at the interruption, at the sharp tone; and her reaction was to say: —

"Well, anyway, they can't really afford an infant."

Even as she spoke she was humiliated by the realization of her own words.

Mary saw the color rise and took it as a sign of petty temper. The rift in her own composure widened.

"You are always inclined to imagine, Athene, that the realities of life can be bought by money."

The words fell with a cool acidity on Athene's understanding; the acid burned, and her cry, "That isn't fair to me. You *know*" — betrayed her pain and her amazement. "How can you say that of me, Mother?"

She wanted to understand, to be reassured.

Mary felt a sudden hatred of the girl's shocked and elegant loveliness. She knew that she was n't being fair. She knew that Athene was utterly unconscious of the way that money conditioned her life and outlook.

"Because I see it, Athene. Because I 've seen it more and more ever since Geoffrey brought you to England over a year ago."

"But — Mother!" Athene was too bewildered to be angry, too hurt to summon coherent speech or action.

"Yes," Mary repeated, "it 's true. You don't realize it, but your whole point of view is saturated with money, stupefied with it. Your whole existence seems saturated with the notion that wealth is a kind of — divine right to everything — even to love and affection. You came, having married Geoffrey without being in the least in love with him, simply imagining you had a right to his love. D' you suppose I did n't see that at once? D' you suppose that he does n't see that now? And feel it? And blame himself? You don't know what it is to be in love; you are n't capable of it. You 're blinded by your own sentimentality. You talk about aspirations and ideals while you wreck my son's happiness. And you 're so selfish and so wrapped up in your own romantic notions that you don't even see what you 're doing."

"But — he does n't — "

"You know that he adores you. You 've traded on that from the beginning. You take, and take, and you give him nothing. You go in for a futile flirtation with Denis Mortlake, and you make Geoffrey feel a cad for resenting it; and when there 's anything he can't give in to you about, such as this business over his political career, when you expect your money to buy him a career and he won't take it — then you make him feel he 's being brutal to you."

Athene's lips were pressed hard together. She rose to her feet.

"How *dare* you? You have no right to speak this way to me."

"You had no right to ruin my son's life by marrying him for a romantic caprice."

Mary's sentences forced their way out with a choking, tearing bitterness. "No wife should behave as you do; and no mistress would dare to treat a man as you treat Geoffrey. Don't you *see* that he looks ill and worn out? Or do you see nothing and understand nothing that's real? Or are you merely," she flung out, "absolutely stupid and absolutely frivolous?" She sat shuddering, locking her fingers together on her lap. "Two of my sons have been killed, and now — you — "

She got up. She saw Athene's face as a blurred concentration of light. The room was blurred. She said: "I think I'd better go."

Outside the front door the wind streaked into her eyes and nostrils. She descended the steps, clutching her coat across her body. A man on the pavement carrying a basket — a great yellow blur.

"Daffadils, lidy? Lahvely daffadils?"

She turned away, bowing her head against the wind. His words broke after her: —

"Shilling a bunch, lidy — lahvely daff . . . Shill — "

VI

Blundell brought in the whiskey and soda, and set it down on the table by the window. Geoffrey looked up from his book.

"What time did Mrs. Graham go out, Blundell?"

"I should say about thirty-six minutes ago, sir." The man slightly wagged his head as if to ease therein the

weighty process of reflection. "I should say only about seven minutes before you came in, sir."

"She did n't say when she 'd be back?"

"No, sir. She left no message. Her ladyship was here for tea, and I thought very likely Mrs. Graham had gone out with her ladyship." He paused, and then added with an unctuous haste: "I happened to be hout myself, sir."

"At the Eight Bells, Blundell?"

"Yes, sir. I had to fetch —"

"I see. Naturally." Geoffrey acknowledged the intimation with a tact and gravity due to Blundell's own demeanor.

Blundell put another log on the fire and went out, closing the door after him.

Geoffrey poured himself out a whiskey and soda and sat down again, placing the glass beside him on the lacquer table. His body felt tired enough to sink pleasurably into the armchair, while his mind was in that state of lucidity which he occasionally achieved between two bouts of insatiable mental unrest. As he lay back, his book open on his knee, he had a sense of mental poise that seemed, as it permeated his whole consciousness, to become identified with a sense of quiet and irrefutable power. And though he knew it as a sensation of the moment, the feeling was so absolute, the awareness of power so perfect, that it became credible to him that the moment might spread and lap him about, as he sat now, in a sudden eternity.

Petty perplexities evaporated, and greater problems became clear matters to be dealt with clearly. And in this moment the problem of Athene, which for months had beset his spirit with its torturing and fugitive implications, began to resolve itself, with the slow-dripping purity of melting snow, into the realization that the whole causative wrong had been his fault at the begin-

ning; that the fault lay in his way of treating her; and that it was for him, deliberately and with the love he had for her, to reconstruct their existence together.

He had asked her to marry him, driven by an impulse which he could n't ever quite account for, yet which he knew would, in a repetition of the circumstances, possess him again. They had had little — and he 'd known it at the time — in common. But he 'd been in love. And she? Half in love? Their very differences had perhaps created that phase of peculiar mutual fascination — an intellectual fascination, distinct from and yet made coherent by their emotional and physical attraction. He remembered how each renewed sight of her would throttle him by its shock. He remembered her sudden kisses; the close, elliptical pallor of her eyelids.

Their differences of education, family, background. The very air and climate. He 'd brought her to a strange country and strange family. He 'd been, in a way, casual about it, as though she were an English girl he 'd known all his life. He 'd treated her revelations of psychological discomfort as incidents in the process of adaptation. Without realizing his own attitude, he 'd been all the time expecting her to adapt herself, to acclimatize; he 'd never tried to help. And when, with her hurt, wide-eyed arrogance, she talked of "misunderstanding," and produced a jargon of "points of view" and "sympathies," he 'd been casual — partly because he was embarrassed by attempts to discuss anything so vital and so intimate, partly because he was afraid to dwell on the development of their relation.

Unconsciously he 'd let himself be annoyed by absurd irrelevancies: by her liking or admiration for people he felt to be futile; by her undisguised pleasure in titles; by her inability to appreciate *Punch* — he 'd told her *Punch* was the finest product of the English spirit, and she 'd

said she thought the *Morning Post* was much more typical. He 'd made what was naturally alien in her a cause of their personal alienation. And yet, all through, he 'd felt that he was to blame, only he had n't seen how.

He 'd been hurt and inexplicit where explanation was most necessary. He 'd been, at the beginning, merely adoring where he should have been protective. And when she was just making friends, when her eagerness compelled her forward into new personal experiences, he 'd had scruples about interfering; he 'd forced himself to be detached when she most needed his guidance.

The clock out on the landing struck six.

Six chimes of elation. He thought how soon she must come in. He imagined her quick step, her opening the door.

It was all quite clear to him — how he would explain to her, tell her, break down the barriers. Even if she were mistrustful at first, he would make her realize. The room became suddenly redolent of her, silently steeped in beauty — the red curtains, the red rifted masses of roses.

The good moment held, still bound him in its spasm of infinite calm. He took up his book again.

. . . Thus the work that lay before the generation of 320 B.C. was twofold. They had to rebuild a new public spirit, devoted not to the City, but to something greater; and they had to rebuild a religion or philosophy which should be a safe guide in the threatening chaos. . . .

VII

Big Ben struck six.

Six notes of gigantic, measured solemnity.

The echoes percolated through the curtains of a Queen Anne window in Marsham Street, and died swiftly, as

if the atmosphere in the low-ceilinged, littered room allowed no gradual sinking into silence.

"Take me away, Denis!"

It seemed to him that she had been standing and talking to him across the ink-stained walnut table ever since he could remember. "Take me away until I can forget!" Her features had a rigidity that made her look suddenly older. He felt her final words as half command, half appeal. He was moved by the notion of an appeal from her charming, arrogant lips.

All the time she was speaking, he had been affected by the idea that she should have come to him, yet coolly curious as to what the outcome of her move would be. He felt that he was n't responsible, — he had been astounded at the way she 'd swept into his rooms, — but he could n't help cherishing the piquancy of a situation in which Geoffrey Graham's wife should come to him, apparently in the belief that he was able to save her soul.

He temporized: "Take you, my dear?"

He had n't calculated that the comedy he 'd half ironically and half sentimentally begun with her should ever work out, and so abruptly, to any kind of crisis.

She put her hand to her forehead; something in him acknowledged the value of the gesture.

"I feel that life has betrayed me, Denis. I feel I just don't want ever to set eyes on any of them again. She insulted me. She was unfair — utterly unfair. She said I did n't care about anything but money. How she could ever imagine such a thing!"

"But Geoffrey — ?"

He was trying to gauge how far her words bore any relation to actuality. Was she merely intoxicated with the sense of her outraged dignity? Or did she genuinely mean him to act upon her declaration?

"Geoffrey!" A momentary painful hesitation was

merged in a renewed fierce outbreak of chagrin. "Geoffrey and I have absolutely no spiritual or intellectual contacts whatsoever. Our marriage has been a cruel and terrible mistake right from the beginning."

He sat down and stared at her, his chin resting on his hands.

"I think that's true of all marriages."

But for once generalization had no appeal for her.

"Our points of view are absolutely different; we have n't a single aim in common." Her tone grew quieter, implying poignant reflections. "He 's so — terribly *terre à terre,* Denis. He does n't even seem to understand all sorts of things that are dearest to me. I wanted to help him. It seemed to me I might be a real comrade to him, but somehow I never could be. Perhaps he 's one of those men who are born to be celibate and don't need a woman's sympathies and intuition the way so many men do."

"I think," Denis said, "that all men do." He was thinking about himself. But she took the words for herself.

"I think that we understand one another, Denis."

He looked oddly at her. Then, after a pause, he said: —

"You really are — asking me to go away with you?" He was watching her intensely. There was something enchanting about the dramatic pose of her body. That green dress so deliciously emphasized her slenderness.

She bent on him one of her looks of wide and beautiful purpose.

"You must take me away, out of England. Away from England," she repeated with an intonation almost of petulance. "To-morrow," she asserted.

He was trying to take it in: that she really meant —

She said, "I've left my luggage — I just packed a

valise and dressing bag before I left Cheyne Walk — at the Grosvenor Hotel. My idea — "

It came over him how rapid and detailed had been her decision, and as she concisely explained to him her arrangements, — to stay that night at the hotel, go to her bank at ten in the morning, and meet him, having arranged their reservations, at the eleven o'clock boat train, — he experienced, beneath the interplay of his doubts and excitement and a certain sense of the grotesque, a respect for her efficiency; an instinctive efficiency, imperturbable by spiritual upheavals of emotional stress.

"I shall write Geoffrey to-night and post the letter just before we leave to-morrow."

"He must wonder where you've gone."

She hesitated, and then broke out with a curious nervous spite: "He'll imagine I'm with you, I expect. He's always had a queer idea about us."

"You mean he's jealous?" He got up and took his pipe off the mantelpiece.

"He's like most of the world. Friendship with a woman is a perfectly incomprehensible idea to him." She raised a solemn and candid look to his. "I mean the way that we're friends, Denis." She grasped both his hands in hers. He felt them small and cool and surprisingly strong. She looked into his eyes, but her look was veiled and baffling, as though it were uplifted to an impersonal distance.

"I feel this is going to be a great adventure for us both, Denis."

His impulse to question, to demand from her some explicit intimation of the exact nature and duration of the "adventure," was checked by the sensation of her palms pressed against his. Her face was close enough for him to see how the red on her lower lip had been casually daubed on, exposing a tiny coral space.

"A very great adventure in our friendship," she said, and drew back, still with that misty, sweet gaze. "To-morrow then, Denis dear."

An unconscious resentment roused his skepticism at the whole affair.

"Where to, by the way?"

Her rapt air was faintly disconcerted by his tone.

"Where d'you propose we're to go to?" he asked.

"Why — didn't I tell you? I suppose," she indulged for a second in gently smiling astonishment, "I suppose I was so carried away. Why, to Rapallo, of course."

"Of course?"

She said: "I've always wanted to go there. Mother has a sketch of it at home, in her boudoir. She went there once as a girl. I've always had a feeling about it — the Italian hills sloping right down into the blue Mediterranean."

"Yes," he said, "it's an undeniably romantic picture."

VIII

Spears of rain splintering incessantly against the carriage windows.

Cannes. Nice. Monte Carlo. Mentone. An elaborate succession of wedding cakes left out in the rain.

Dripping palm trees. The Mediterranean, leaden and dimly phosphorescent under a lowering sky. Gulls circling low on the shores, and under dark rocks.

Athene tried not to admit to herself that she was discouraged.

Denis's mouth felt thick and acrid; his eyes were hot. They had n't been able to get sleepers. They had sat up all night, in company with a gentleman who wore a tie pin headed by an ivory edelweiss and at intervals squeezed two oranges through a handkerchief and drank the juice

from a collapsible nickel cup, which he then replaced in a pocket of his overcoat.

The heat in the carriage was stifling; but whenever they opened the window the smuts poured in and stuck against their necks and hands and faces. The lavatory smelled so abominable that washing was a feat of endurance.

Every time they reeled along the corridors to the *wagon-restaurant*, they came into a stale, steamy redolence of innumerable former meals.

During the night the roaring and racketing and clanging of the train battered all attempts at speech into mere signs or occasional mouthing shouts. Denis had read *Le Matin* and *La Vie Parisienne* and dozed, with a perpetual sense of floundering about through layers of nightmare. Athene had tried, according to formula, to gain repose by closing her eyes and thinking only of the blood flowing to the tips of her fingers. But most of the night she'd sat in a state of curious static receptivity, conscious, as much with her nerves as with her vision, of Denis hunched opposite her; of his lock of hair dank on his forehead; his brows and lips contracted; his glance slanting out at her, yet never meeting her own; of the white antimacassars of the carriage; the white P.L.M.; the colored maritime views on either side of the heat regulator; the buttons dimpling the dark blue upholstery; the gentleman in the corner, with his veined eyelids and the gloved hands folded across his paunch. At Marseilles she'd got out on to the lamplit platform and bought a *Cahier Vert*, and Denis had asked her to get him some cigarettes at the same time. As they rattled eastward, she'd watched the mirror blackness of the windows change to slate gray, and from slate gray to a grayish oyster-colored mist; and then, eastward, streaks of brief cold red; and then the rain.

At Mentone the man in the frogged coat got out, trailing a last faint smell of oranges.

At Ventimiglio the customs officer catechized her in thick Italianate French. When he had fumbled in her dressing bag and pondered over a glass phial which contained her tooth brushes, he jerked his thumb at Denis's unshaven and comatose countenance.

"Et M'sieu votre mari?"

She said quickly, "Denis!"

He started. "What the—" he said sulkily, and seemed at the same moment to analyze her and the official. He dragged down his suitcases. From the next carriage came female cries of "Impossible! Now see here, officer, Helen had this phonograph given her on her birthday last year."

"Pas de grande bagage?" demanded the man, when Denis's clothes lay tumultuously over the suitcases and carriage seat.

They shook their heads.

Denis began to shove back his clothes.

"You've brought a lot of things," Athene remarked.

He paused and glanced queerly at her.

"I didn't know how long our *ménage* would last."

She disliked the term "ménage," but she made no comment. And the reminder of the situation stirred in her a renewed sense of outrage, and of the fine and inevitable and almost consecrated quality of their expedition. So that her next remark seemed to Denis to emerge from a miasma of quiet intensity:—

"You'll be able to write, Denis."

"Write—?"

"At Rapallo. It must be the most wonderfully inspiring place."

For a second he glanced out at the flying panorama of sea and rain and drenched palm trees.

"I shall look to you," he said, "for inspiration."

His words, pronounced with an obscure hardness, tended to crystallize her conception of the sublimated "helpfulness" which might be her rôle.

IX

THE electric sign, GRAND HOTEL, crowned the portals.

They mounted the terrace of steps, a little dazzled after their drive from Genoa.

Athene paused on the top step before following Denis in. The roar of the sea came up to her through the darkness, and through a screenwork of trees she had a glimpse of lights surrounding a bay, and the tossed reflections of lights. The smell of salt whipped her face.

Harbor lights. Salt wind. Geoffrey's voice: "Oh darling, I do hope I can make you happy!" The memory twisted her nerves.

The porter bowed as he held open the door for her, and a bell boy took her traveling rug. She waited while Denis finished talking to the concierge. When he turned and came toward her she saw that he was no longer sullen.

"It's all arranged," he said. He seemed to be possessed by an inward reckless amusement. His moods were curious, she thought.

The porter stepped after them into the lift. While they were going up, Denis stepped close to her and looked down into her face. Something in the look made her draw back, and as she did so she was conscious that the smile left his lips, and that the intensity of his gaze had a provocative glint. And as they stepped out of the lift she was disconcerted by the sense of his nearness.

They followed the porter along the corridor. He rattled his keys and went up to a door.

"Number sevenni-five." He had the American accent of the traveled Italian of his class. He opened the door and switched on a downpour of electric light. He scuttled across the room and flung open another door, and, switching on more light, revealed a bathroom. As he scuttled back, his little uniformed person was reflected in various-sized mirrors. He laid the key down on the dressing table.

"And you'll bring supper up here as I arranged with the concierge?"

"Sure. Yes, sir." Suddenly he caught sight of Athene's expression, and his obsequious air became tinged with a startled and faintly leering curiosity. Still glancing at her, he bowed himself out and shut the door.

"And—my room?" Athene stood with her back to the door. This immense and be-mirrored apartment, the mahogany furniture, the yellow-frilled lights, the parquet floor, and the bed adorned with its immense yellow eider-down and overhung by the high wire frame intended for mosquito curtains, had already, to her vision, a staring and feverish familiarity.

He threw down his hat and began to smooth his hair in front of the mirror in the wardrobe.

"They haven't got two connecting rooms, so we shall have to manage without a dressing room for—"

She broke out: "How *dare* you?" and then was speechless. In the glass he caught sight of her. Their looks met. He turned slowly, holding his comb in an arrested movement above his head.

"How dare you *imagine—?*" she broke out again. Her breath came quickly. It was horrible to her that he should stand there and look her up and down from between narrowed eyelids; look at her with an amazement which gradually changed to a fastidious and yet deliberately brutal curiosity.

He put the comb back in his pocket.

"My dear creature, what else should I imagine? What else—" His glance slewed from her face to the enormous yellow eiderdown. "Come in," he said.

She moved aside as two men brought in their luggage, and stared at him as he directed them in his somewhat conscious Italian, where to place each case. When they had gone out, each grasping a lira, he came over to where she stood.

"Well?" he demanded with a soft, equivocal intonation, and it became apparent to her that he didn't yet consider her attitude more than a caprice, a momentary affectation of prudery. He touched her furs with a gesture so naïve that her words were checked. Then suddenly his hands slid from her furs and over her shoulders, and grasped her whole body.

"Silly little fool!" She felt the uneven thudding of his heart. "Silly and most alluring little fool!" He began to kiss her with a silent, experimental ferocity.

As suddenly he let her go, so that she stumbled and sank dizzily on the edge of the bed. She sat staring at him, trembling.

There was a knock at the door.

"Oh," he spoke unevenly, "it's supper."

"Come in," she said clearly. "Put it there," she said, "on the table—that's right." She dismissed the man with a nod.

Then she began to cry, stiffly, contorting her mouth, her hands clenched at her sides.

"That," he remarked, "was by way of—instruction."

Her stare questioned him.

"To instruct you," he amplified, "a little in the manner of this wicked world and in the technique of elopement."

"Elopement?" She pressed her hands together. "How do you *dare*—when I *thought*—"

"Then you really—" He began finally to admit it to himself, that she actually was n't playing up; that she genuinely and with an inept and incredible sincerity did n't expect— "Then you really do mean—"

"D' you suppose," she continued, and her voice was thick with her tears, "that it ever entered my head? D' you imagine I 'd have come to you the way I did?"

The beauty of her tragic pose quickened his exasperation.

"I repeat, what else should I imagine? What else would any man, if a woman comes to his rooms and—"

"Man! Woman!" Her contempt spoke the bitterness of a profound disappointment. "I did n't suppose you 'd be just exactly like everybody else and only be able—to—think that I—"

Through his own chagrin he was startled by the perception of how angry she was. He 'd never imagined her possessed by temper, stuttering with a sense of outrage.

"I came to you," she continued, "so I might have somebody to help me in a crisis in my life. I—"

"You must have known I've been half in love with you ever since we met!"

"I never dreamed—"

"You must have been singularly stupid, then. Why otherwise do you suppose I've sought your company so much? Taken you out?"

"Then you thought I was—" the word seemed to fill her with an almost physical revulsion—"was—flirting with you? And that all the time we were going around together I meant that? And—and that when I came to you it was just the logical result?"

"Certainly more logical than this situation." He paused; the "situation" was dawning upon his peculiar sense of the tragi-grotesque, and assuming for him a quality perverse and painful, and yet almost irresistibly

bizarre. "It's no use your telling me," his narrowed glance veered from her to a reflection of them both, she sitting rigid on the bed, himself leaning against the wardrobe, his arms folded, his head bent a little back, "that you are disappointed in me, or that your ideal of our friendship has been shattered, or that I am a brute, or even that all men, myself included, are brutal and don't understand women. Your pathos won't in the least affect me. I'm sorry for you, because you seem to suffer from so many delusions, and it's always terribly shattering to unlearn them. But even with my knowledge of you"—he brought out his words with an increasing yet detached bitterness—"I didn't seriously believe that you could be *quite* so silly as to delude yourself that I should go chasing across Europe with you to fiddle Platonics on the shores of the Mediterranean!"

"You've betrayed our friendship. I believed—" Her small face was taut and blurred with tears.

"Our friendship was always a figment of your imagination. But, by dint of a good deal of proximity, I was quite a little in love with you. I should, of course, never have considered your becoming my mistress—partly because I was never so much in love that it was really vital to me, and partly because I supposed you, like most of your countrywomen, confounded flirtation with honor and passion with shame. But, of course, when you came to my rooms and demanded that I should take you away—"

"Couldn't you *see* that it was your help I needed? I felt I just hadn't a friend in the world. I turned to you, and you—"

"My dear Athene! You didn't want help—you wanted a dramatic situation. I assure you no one understands that better than I do. I adore situations. I live on them. That's partly why I came with you at all.

But I don't expect these little make-believes to do more than solace one's thirst for novelty and one's desire to feel important — or, at the best, to make one forget the peculiar futility of existence."

"You're horrible — brutal."

"Terribly good for you. You need a little brutality of this kind. You never face facts. Also, though perhaps I'm scarcely the right person to point it out, your treatment of Geoffrey in this matter has been an example of refined brutality. After all, half your motive in running off like this was to hurt Geoffrey. Doubtless you've been successful. I only wish I could produce the same reaction in Patricia. Unfortunately she does n't love me, so I can't make her suffer the pangs of jealousy on my behalf, as you can your husband."

"I — never — "

He continued more slowly, lighting a cigarette and glancing at her over the flare of the match: —

"Of course, the trouble about this situation is that you've rather spoiled it by introducing this purity anti-climax. Misunderstood wife turns elsewhere for sympathy — excellent: most popular theme. Literary young man, at odds with life, has long admired the beautiful Mrs. X — again excellent. Mrs. X finally flies to this young man from the cruel insults of her mother-in-law. So far, so good. They decide to seek a newer and deeper life together, and make off to Italy (your idea of Rapallo) — excellent again. But when Mrs. X, who has so gallantly instituted this salubrious elopement, suddenly loses all grip of her rôle and switches to the theme of the decoyed virgin — "

Athene got up and walked to the door.

Down in the entrance hall the concierge bowed and took up the telephone. Of course Mrs. Mortlake could have a motor. To go to Genoa? Yes.

He put down the receiver. He had ordered one of the hotel motors, he said. His bistre eyelids scarcely flickered. It would be four hundred lire, he said.

Dimly she recollected — three hundred.

"We paid three hundred here *from* Genoa."

His olive features, his black moustache, betrayed nothing.

"Four hundred. *Prix fixe*, after eleven o'clock P.M." he added.

X

She got out at Victoria with such a sense of aching excitement that she could only account for it by telling herself that she was overstrained. She gazed up and down the platform.

"Luggage, miss?"

"No, I haven't any."

The porter looked curiously at the pale young lady who arrived first class on the boat train and had no luggage.

She had sent him a telegram. That must be he in that brown hat — the hat had a face with a pince-nez under it. That? But no — she couldn't believe that he wouldn't have come. But perhaps — perhaps he would be waiting outside.

Outside, the car was waiting for her. As she got in, she tried to believe that he was waiting for her at home, because — She leaned back; she saw herself coming in. He would have been waiting, waiting, and listening for the car, for the front-door bell, for her voice in the hall, her step. She saw him holding out his arms. Herself, saying, "Geoffrey, I've come back to you!" His gratitude. His arms round her. The beginning of their real life — real understanding.

Again that strange, aching excitement held her; her lips were dry. Now, at this moment, he must be waiting, listening. All the rest was a bad dream — Denis — Rapallo. But the recollection was brutally clear. That room. The way he'd kissed her. His words. She wrenched her mind to the present, the future.

The car drew up in Cheyne Walk. She let herself in with her latchkey.

"Geoffrey!" she called.

There was no answer.

On the table was a pile of letters, on the top a letter in her father's handwriting. Mechanically she took it up and slipped it into her handbag. She tiptoed up the staircase. Perhaps he hadn't heard her.

She tiptoed to the door; opened it. The room was dark.

Perhaps — he must be in his own room on the next landing. She hurried up; there was a chink of light under the door. She seized the doorknob.

He was standing with his back to her by the bureau, papers and letters strewn about him.

"Geoffrey!" she whispered.

He turned. When she saw his face she was frightened. He looked so young and so ill and so desperate. She stood still, clutching the knob.

They were silent. She tried to speak and couldn't.

At last he said: —

"I had your wire. I'm just going. I didn't realize you'd be back so soon. I was sorting out my papers."

"But —"

His tones were impersonal.

"I think," he said, "that you'll find that the rest of my things are all removed."

Her whisper dragged itself out into the room.

"But — I've come back to you, Geoff."

"I'm afraid you misunderstood the situation. This is your house. I'm leaving it. Any other arrangement would be impossible."

"But, Geoff! Listen to me."

"I had your wire saying you were coming back and asking me to meet you. I naturally concluded you meant yourself and Mortlake. The idea of meeting you and your lover was n't really —"

"But, Geoff, he *is n't* my lover. He never — I never *imagined* such a thing."

He paused. He seemed to focus her with a bitter distaste. Then he turned and began to collect the papers in the bureau.

She came toward him, and laid her hand on his arm. He jerked away.

"But, Geoff, Geoff! Don't you *see?* I did it because I was hurt. I never cared for Denis — not the way I do —" she broke off, startled by her own words.

"You could n't have done this unless —"

"I thought he and I were friends. It was only when we got there that I realized. We quarreled."

He went on sorting papers with mechanical precision.

"I — Don't you see, Geoff, I was sore at what your mother said — and it had seemed to me that you —"

"Yes?" he asked sharply.

"That you did n't care."

"So, for a — a caprice —?"

"I wanted to get out of it all, and get away. I wanted to get away from England. I felt absolutely desperate and disillusioned."

He put a sheaf of papers into the dispatch case and closed it down. She saw that he meant to go.

"Geoffrey!" She thought, "He can't leave me!" It seemed impossible that he should be able to go now, like this; to go out and leave her.

"Geoffrey, dear!"

He looked down at her. His look was dark and jagged with pain. He said: "You know my solicitors' address. I shan't act in any way unless I hear from you."

Her sense of impotence made her wonder if she were going mad. She was despairingly conscious that he must n't go.

She held out her arms to him.

"Geoffrey!"

The door slammed.

She realized that the dawn was breaking, and that she had been there, sitting or walking about in her own room, all night.

The tawny staining of the sky recalled that dawn seen two mornings before from the train as something incredibly remote, something unreal, yet with a disquieting significance. She realized that she still had on her traveling coat. Her hat lay on the floor by the dressing table. Her handbag had been flung beside her on Geoffrey's bed.

Between her fingers she still held her father's letter, her thumb lying across those lines which, in the last few hours, had become so familiar. The very fact that he 'd written to her by hand — she had never had any but typed letters from him all her life — seemed to her tautened sensibilities to give the contents an added pathos. The letter had been written nearly three weeks before; he must have hesitated to post it. She had a vision of him, ill and harassed, sitting down to write news of material reverses to her while she was unaware how soon the very structure of her spiritual security would be destroyed. He had written to her that she "must try to enjoy love in a cottage for a while."

There seemed to her to be something lovable and yet pathetic in his anxiety for her; his dwelling on her comforts and needs; his hope that in a year or two he'd be able to give her just the same amount again; his chagrin that he couldn't pay all the bills for the house which she so lightly, and as a matter of course, had sent across to him. The material seemed to him so vital, so absolute; he seemed to have envisaged her as struck down, almost heartbroken, by the news that his sudden financial losses made it impossible for him to continue her allowance. It mattered so little to her, she thought — comparatively. And there came over her again that feeling of desolation. Even now she couldn't completely believe that Geoffrey had gone.

But for them — her thoughts returned again to her parents — for them she could see this break-up of their material life as tragedy. "Only just enough for Mamma and me to get along with for a while." He spoke of a "small apartment." And they, Mother and he, were so accustomed to, so dependent on, their luxury. Their whole happiness and social position depended upon it; the estimation of their friends was so terribly conditioned by it. She could see how gradually fewer and fewer of their friends would bother. A small apartment. It wasn't — that was so much clearer to her now — like in England, where people didn't seem to mind; where "sets" depended so much less on similarity of income; where people like Jeremy and Bobs, who hadn't as much as Mother's chauffeur, could be "received"; where, Athene knew, Lady Rosenheim would like to be invited — and wasn't.

The thought of her parents in a small apartment awoke all her compassion and strengthened her sense of an immediate duty — to write and reassure them that she could manage very well without the allowance, and to tell them

nothing, yet, of what had happened. At least, she thought, they must feel assured of her happiness.

For herself, the future lurked about her and yet eluded her grasp. The apprehension that Geoffrey had gone and that, in fact, he never meant to see her again, worked in her like a vaguely throbbing insult. And yet it didn't seem possible. Her hand stretched out and touched his pillow, and rested so for a long time.

Did he hate her now? Did he really think that she'd gone off with Denis — just like any — light woman? Couldn't he realize that she'd meant — But he'd known Denis better than she. It came over her with a reaction of bitterness that, even in this, he hadn't trusted or understood her. And his mother — she came back to Mary's words — had insulted her, degraded her, by the same implications; talked of her "flirtation" with Denis. She saw her own relation with Denis as only another tragedy of betrayed ideals, and in a spasm of resentment she accused them simultaneously, Geoffrey and Denis, of desecrating all her hopes, all her cherished aspirations. Dramatically she recalled and felt for a second, felt in her very limbs, the sweet, vivid sensations with which she'd left America, the glow of hope and interest and resolution. And it seemed to her that England itself had betrayed her.

Her father's letter fluttered down to the carpet. She mechanically noted the upturned phrase, "in the immediate future."

The future? Immediate future?

And then, through obscurities of anger and desolation and questioning, her practical sense began to work. By selling the house and the car she could just about pay the accumulated bills for its furnishing. Thus her house and her debts would be disposed of; if any debts remained they could be canceled by selling her jewelry. She would

arrange to do this as soon as possible. She would have in Mr. Bickerstaff and speak about the sale of the house. And then — somehow the anticipation of even incidental activity touched her pride and latent energy. And then?

She went over to the dressing table where the shaded electric candles still warded off the daylight with their focused brilliance. She took down her hair, and then remembered that her dressing bag —

She took a muslin jacket and an extra brush out of the drawer. She wondered if Powell, her maid, were still asleep — it was five and twenty past six now — or whether Powell had left, been dismissed by Geoffrey.

She would let Geoffrey know merely that she was selling the house. She would tell him nothing else. It was unlikely, she concluded, that he would hear of her parents through anyone except herself. She knew that Patricia was n't going to Washington again on her way back. And she would n't ask him — she dragged the brush down through her hair — for anything. She would n't accept anything from him, since he thought of her as another man's mistress. And if he — she was trying to think it out clearly and forcibly — if he did n't insist on a divorce, she would do nothing about it. The whole idea was hateful, unbelievable. She pulled herself together, choked back her tears.

Outside the door one of the housemaids began to brush the landing and staircase. A stiff regular swish across the carpets.

When the house was sold, she would have to face the future. With a suddenness so peculiar that it possessed almost the quality of elation, she realized that she would have to earn her living — to earn money. And with the realization there came back to her, soothing her pride and calming her queer spasms of unhappiness, a renewed and sublime sense of assurance.

She rose to ring and ask if Powell were up yet to prepare her bath. And moving about the room with a resurgence of activity, taking off her coat and dress and shoes, and opening a cupboard to select fresh underclothes and stockings for the day, she became absorbed in a decision as to just what kind of "job" it would be most interesting and most helpful to fulfill.

XI

[*From Denis Mortlake to Patricia Graham, in Chicago*]

February 20, 1927

MY DEAR:—

I suppose that by now you will have had varied and various accounts of my seduction of your sister-in-law! Conceivably you are in that state of mind which prompts you to tear up my letter without reading it. On the other hand, your perspicuity with regard to the lady in question may have been greater than mine, and her little impulse of having a *Paul et Virginie* picnic at the expense of my nerves and the excellent Geoffrey's feelings may seem to you to run on all fours with her whole character.

Personally I still feel rather shattered over the whole episode; the more I think it over the more I am completely bewildered. Her whole behavior and attitude seem quite beyond rational explanation. Of course American men bring up their women to expect a fantastic amount of chivalry, and, considered in that light, it is n't really too odd for an alluring and spoiled young woman like Athene to expect a man to go traipsing across Europe to support her in a kind of nervous tempest. But what is so odd is that she should have supposed that *I* should enjoy this kind of Courier Galahad business.

She appeared in my rooms with a cut-and-dried plan for what I supposed to be an elopement. She was obviously upset, and I supposed — what I think is partly true — that she was more in love with Geoffrey than she knew, and this great panic to "get away" and free of it all — with me —

was simply an instinctive desire to make him feel that he had n't appreciated her — an extreme instance, as it were, of that good old game of keeping a man guessing. Anyway, I was sufficiently intrigued by the situation, and by her, to get thoroughly into it all; the notion had a certain chic; I was quite aware that my part was n't a pretty one, but I 've never been on any terms with Geoffrey, and somehow the notion of its being your sister-in-law gave a morbid charm to the prospect. I did go so far as to mention to her in the train that I should figure as the corespondent, but she merely indulged in her useful faculty of ignoring the unpleasant and said she hated "to think about such things."

It struck me that when we did mention our circumstances, she gave a rather highfalutin tone to the matter, and appeared to be feeling — which I increasingly was n't — rather heroic. But then, that is rather her quality, and part of her charming naïveté. But of course it did n't strike me, until she actually bowled me over with it, that she was so naïve in her notions of either men or women, and especially in her judgment of me, as to expect our little make-believe of friendship to have any meaning. She really was incredibly tiresome and difficult. And finally she "swep' out" in the manner of an insulted heroine, and left me in a quite unnecessarily expensive bedroom, with all her luggage — which I have since dispatched off to Cheyne Walk. For if, after this dénouement, I am any judge of her impulses, her reaction must have been to return to Geoffrey, expecting him to be as much privileged by her return as I was to be by her departure. There is a little song, just out when I was last in New York, which conceivably illustrates Geoffrey's proper state of mind. Whether he came up to scratch I can't tell. It begins: —

> "I 'll take her back
> If she wants to come back,
> The girl that was stolen from me.
> She 's just a child,
> Did n't mean to be wild — "

I forget the rest; anyway more "chivalry."

I rejoice to hear of your banqueting with millionaires on ice cream and illicit champagne. Meanwhile I am recuperating in delightful rooms on the Lung' Arno, and I am

vaguely plotting out a new book. It is to be called *The Beautiful American,* and should be quite enormously successful, as it will be all about the spiritual flirtations of an heiress, who will end by developing religious mania and going into a convent. All worked out rather in the Schnitzler manner. It shall be dedicated to A. G., and I shall add that the main character of this novel is "peculiarly fictitious."

So I hope to taste a slight but not too subtle revenge for the fact that this will be, I suppose, my last letter to you. If I had n't been involved in this particular wild-swan chase, I might have waited out my winter in London until you came back. And then — ? You never give me credit for any caring for you between our meetings. And it would be impossible to expect you to realize a mood in which I go off with Athene with a deliberate idea of thus cutting myself quite, quite definitely out of your life. And the irony of it is that, now that the whole thing is over, I am incapable of recapturing such a mood, and sit down to throw you off just one of those letters which you 'll most despise me for. You will dwell on the ramifications of my conceit and selfishness, and on my "cheap cynicism." But I repeat that it is you, my dear, who might have cured it all, instead of letting me perambulate the earth, the victim of a rancorous inferiority complex.

Yours,

DENIS

P.S. I have just had a letter from Patsy Brough — the youth who helped Athene decorate — forwarded, saying that he hears Mrs. Graham is selling 27a, Cheyne Walk. What, one wonders, does this portend?

PART FIVE

I

THE door closed after him.

Bobs had tears in her eyes.

"Oh, Jeremy, he *is* so unhappy!"

Jeremy shook his head.

"It's rotten bad luck. Bad luck on both of them really. He looks as down and out as I've ever seen a man look. Good thing he's going abroad for a bit."

"I hope it'll do him and Mother both good. She doesn't talk about it, but it's pretty obvious that she feels she's responsible for the way it happened." Bobs paused to listen for a moment, but there was no sound from the nursery. "It is a mess," she added.

"D'you think he will divorce her?"

"Can't tell. I shouldn't think, unless she wants him to. That's how they've left it. As she's sold Cheyne Walk, I suppose that means she's going back to America. You know, I believe he's dreadfully in love with her — even now."

Jeremy was silent. Then he said:—

"I don't think that's odd. Whatever you did, I should love you just as much."

His words entered her veins with a slow, soft pain.

"Oh — darling!" She came and knelt beside him. The movement expressed her abrupt humility. "You are so lovely to me," she said. There was something thick and sunny and good about him. He seemed to embody a quality that so many people lost when they passed out of childhood — a quality of grave joyousness. It never occurred to him to doubt if life were worth while.

He stroked her fringe aside from her forehead.

"I couldn't stop loving you even if I wanted to, my darling. I suppose that's how he feels, too."

"Then," she slowly demanded, and the touch of his hand on her forehead gave an aroma of luxury to her hypothesis, "then, supposing our marriage had worked out like that, and I'd got to feel that it was cramping my life, and that I wished you had a political career and all that sort of thing,—and I might have, quite well, you know; it was quite fifty-fifty when I went into it!—what would you do?"

"I could n't do anything. I don't suppose I should try to. I—I suppose I should feel rather a beast at having persuaded you to marry me."

She leaned up and clasped her arms round his neck.

"I'm so dreadfully glad you did." The freckles on his nose were a funny, friendly pattern. His lashes were yellow at the roots and curled to burnt sienna. She kissed him on the cheek. Her swift electrical happiness made her laugh.

But her new mood left him in the shadow of her former questioning.

"You are quite certain that you're glad?" he brooded. "Sometimes I stop and think to myself, 'Well, I am lucky'; and even then it seems too good to be true."

"Dear—darling!"

Then she became serious again.

"I—I don't think Athene can ever have been as much in love with Geoff, or other things could n't matter to her. I can see that now. A year ago I did n't see; I—" She gave a little shiver, and shook herself away from him. "It's dreadful," she said. "I'm getting all choked up with happiness and domesticity."

They heard the ring of the bell, and Mrs. Thrale lumping hastily to the front door.

"Oh, heavens! There they are, and we have n't begun to change."

Jeremy sprang up.

"By Jove! And it's after half past seven now."

Veronique came in, followed by Clifford. She asked, without any apparent surprise in her light, toneless voice, whether they were too early.

"They've forgotten us, that's all." Clifford kissed Bobs.

"We shall only be ten minutes." She found herself flustered by Veronique's lacquered calm. Jeremy was genuinely upset.

"I *am* sorry! We really won't be long."

Veronique sat down on the pouf by the hearth and lit her cigarette in the gas fire.

"Why change at all?" she said.

Jeremy and Clifford were visibly nonplused at such a suggestion, and Jeremy hurried out after Bobs, with an injunction to Clifford, accompanied by a final gesture toward a corner cupboard, to mix themselves a cocktail.

"Comics," said Veronique.

Clifford opened the cupboard.

"I expect Bobs was making him have a lengthy discussion." He placed a bottle of gin and a bottle of vermouth on the table. "About 'life' or some such weighty subject," he added. He discovered the orange bitters behind a string box and a tin of bath olivers. "Can't find any glasses." He rummaged the higher shelf and finally found two glasses wedged behind a bag of dog biscuit.

Veronique slipped off her cloak. She sat there, immobile and supple, her green dress striking a green light in her long, slanting eyes.

"I should n't like to live like this," she said.

"They never seem to have any ice. We shall have to manage without the shaker." Clifford was tolerant, but at a loss.

Veronique's bare shoulders scarcely shrugged.

"Does n't matter. I can do without one. Can't understand," she pursued, "how anyone can face life like this, unless you 're a crank like my brother and go off the rails altogether. I should get claustromania or something in a flat this size. They have n't even got a dressing room now the baby 's here." She spoke without emphasis, with an uninterested conviction.

"Could n't stand it myself. — Shut up, Achilles, old man. Leave my clean cuffs alone! — Still, they seem perfectly pleased with it all."

Veronique knocked her cigarette ash on to the rug.

"Poverty 's all right for a liaison," she said, "but for a long run like marriage you simply must be fairly well off. I should have thought Bobs could have done better. She 's rather pretty."

"She used to be like your brother Alfred; rather Red. I was relieved, you know, that she got anyone as normal as Jeremy. You should have seen her friends up at Oxford! She was all mixed up with the Labor Club, and then she did economics, which always seems to make people radical, even normal fellows like Geoff, for instance."

"What 's happening about him?"

"Dunno. Nothing, I believe."

"She 's rather a comic, is n't she?"

"A bit. Yes. Probably just her being American." He was preoccupied, his cheeks a little pinker than usual, as he stood looking down at Veronique, sipping at his glass.

"When are we going to get married, Vee?"

"Don't know. Next year — sometime — never."

"Seriously."

"Well, when you 've finished with Oxford, I suppose."

"That 'll be this summer."

"Seems rather soon; besides, I want to go and try winter sports in Canada next winter."

"We might do that as a honeymoon."

"True. That's worth thinking about."

He emptied his glass and put it down on the mantelpiece.

"Have you said anything to your family?"

"Yes. I spoke to Mother."

"I should n't think she was very bucked, was she? It was pretty obvious she wanted you to marry the spotty marquis."

Veronique was silent while she lit a fresh cigarette from the stub of her old one. Then she stamped out the stub under the heel of her gold slipper.

"Oh, she knew I could n't stand him ages ago. She sent us out to play golf together and that fairly finished it; he foozled every drive and most of his other shots, and kept on apologizing and blaming his clubs, which he said he'd borrowed." A laugh slipped out between Veronique's calm, brightly reddened lips. "He said his handicap was three. More like three hundred. I hate insincere people," she added.

"Then your people are n't going to be difficult?"

Her shapely little black head expressed a negative.

"Father never interferes. And Mother does n't mind the idea, especially now that Geoffrey is n't likely to have any children, because then she can hope to have a baronet for a grandson. And besides, she thinks you're a nice 'county' sort of type."

"Splendid. Hope I am. Well, then—"

They were interrupted by a momentary cry from next door.

"There's my nephew waking up." Clifford's eagerness was diverted from Veronique. "I'll go in and console him or Bobs 'll never get dressed."

He whisked out of the room, Veronique viewing his exit with a faint but perfectly amiable astonishment. In

a moment he reappeared, carrying the baby and chuckling down into its face.

"Is n't he a jolly little chap? Look at him, Vee, look at him staring round. He 's awfully bucked at being taken up. He stopped squealing at once. Look!" Clifford sat down in an armchair and began gently rocking the bundle of white shawl and dress and round surprised head and struggling fat arms. "Look, Vee, are n't his eyes jolly? Look at him looking up at me! He 's awfully pleased. Know your uncle, don't you, old chap?"

Veronique's impassivity gave way to interest.

"I believe he 's smiling at you, Cliff!"

The small countenance was touched by an obscure and yet intense amusement.

"Well, Michael! D' you like your uncle, Michael?"

But Michael's features had softened back to their usual blend of surprise and contentment.

"Let me have him, Cliff?"

"All right. Only sit square and take him on your lap properly. That 's it." Gently he deposited the baby in her arms and then drew himself up and straightened his white waistcoat. "Wonder what Bobs 'll say," he grinned.

Veronique sat holding the child, eyeing it with the detached tenderness of a Madonna. Its hand closed round one of her brown, perfectly manicured fingers. Instinctively she smiled; the smile lit the oval of her face to a sensuous contentment.

Bobs came in, combing her hair.

"Why — what on earth — "

Clifford intercepted an interrogation pointed sharply at Veronique.

"My fault, Bobs. We heard him squeak and I went and fetched him."

"He's never taken up between half-past six and ten. Never."

Clifford knew the storm signals.

"My fault. Honestly, Bobs, it was only for a joke. And besides, it was such fun to see him."

She hesitated, partly mollified, yet she took the baby from Veronique with a gesture that was like snatching, and held it close.

"You had n't any right, Cliff." She ignored Veronique and her cheeks flared.

Jeremy, who had followed her in, patted her shoulder.

"Now then, darling, you go off and get him to sleep, and we'll start dinner without you."

To Clifford's surprise, she gave in.

"All right." And with a hardly perceptible effort she turned to Veronique. "I hope you don't mind; I expect he'll go off at once."

Veronique shook her head.

"Rather not." She was enclosed once more in her flawless negation.

Bobs switched on the lamp in the nursery, and laid Michael in his cot, and tucked the blankets round him. She put a silk handkerchief of Jeremy's over the lamp-shade. He cried, first sharply, then tentatively. She waited. She could hear the murmur of voices from the dining room; Clifford's cheerful laughter; Mrs. Thrale treading to and fro from the kitchen.

Michael's cries sank to a fretful murmur; his small consciousness was struggling and gradually being muffled in the great softness of sleep.

She wondered at her own anger just now. It would have been different if she had given him to Veronique. Odd streaks of savagery one had, catching one by the throat, getting the better of one.

He was asleep.

She stood looking down at him. Every now and then he made little vehement movements; miniature expressions flitted over his features. He must be dreaming — minute dreams, like the shadows of tiny white birds.

II

In the darkness the walls were close and unfamiliar. Athene turned, and turned again.

She knew that the curtains were of red plush, and there were inner curtains like disused wedding veils. And their existence seemed to account for an atmosphere of staleness which hung in the darkness and seemed to permeate even the sheets that she clutched uneasily to her chin.

She had never known ugliness except in combination with luxury.

The darkness pressed even under her lids and seemed to filter round into her very eye-sockets. Her nerves were chilled and edged with a consciousness of anti-climax. It was as though the feverish and incessant business of the last ten days — ten days? only ten days since she'd come home and found Geoffrey — had been in itself an inspiration; the innumerable transactions, letters, arrangements, seemed to have given her in their fulfillment a cumulative sense of strength; and though she had n't paused to examine its nature, she had come to take more and more for granted that this strength was a weapon dispensed to her by Providence for her future contests with circumstances. And when, this afternoon, she'd left Cheyne Walk and heard her own accents directing her taxi to the Amberley Hotel, and sat assured and even with a lurking zest of adventure while the taxi crossed the Park and finally rattled through Manchester Square, she'd still had that feeling of efficiency.

There had been an exhilarating nip of reality in her first entry. The hotel had figured in her plans as humble and inexpensive, and as she'd stood surveying the Axminster carpets, the aspidistras and ferns in brass bowls, the groups of wicker chairs and tables with glass tops, as she conferred with the porter over her luggage, and mounted the stairs through odors of defunct roasts, even in those moments she had been able to see the hotel as a temporary if narrow circumstance. And if, as she entered her bedroom, it held for her any adumbration of depression, she took it as a significant challenge, and renewed her determination to face the small as well as the larger realities of change. She'd gone down to take her dinner in the same spirit of determined cheerfulness.

And then, with a reaction seemingly so abrupt that she had no time to resort to reason or precept, she found herself sickened with a feeling of desolation.

She'd come back to her room and begun to unpack, touching every one of her garments and possessions as though in their familiarity they had become frantically dear to her.

The water had been tepid in her bath, and she kept imagining the other people who had trodden on the cork mat. She'd taken two aspirins, and lain down, and put out the light.

Now she could see by the phosphorescent dial of her clock that it was twenty past twelve.

She turned over her pillow. The bed creaked when she moved. Details swam and fell about in her mind like liver spots. To get a small bookcase to-morrow. Tell Papa she'd sold Cheyne Walk for a more convenient-sized house. He'd think that reasonable, under the circumstances.

Etty Reslaw might help — take her into her decorating business. Etty was — well, *déclassée*, a little. But

then you could n't choose. That was only to fall back on. Something more intellectual — more important — political speaking — was n't that often paid? — League of Nations Union work — or — endless possibilities, anyway. That small investment she 'd asked Sir Philip Rosenheim to make for her would bring in about fifty pounds a year. Nothing to count on, fifty pounds a year, still there was that four hundred and sixty pounds to sell out if necessary. Anyway, a decently paid job — salaries. What were English salaries anyway? A good job of any kind must pay well. It would be possible to live on ten pounds a week — that and the fifty extra. Not much left for clothes, but still, next year — And meanwhile that might do.

Through the wall she could hear a heavy, regular breathing. Unconsciously she shifted farther from the wall. A taxi creaked to a standstill out in the street. She heard the occupant step out on to the pavement, then the taxi creaking and rattling off again.

Every now and then footsteps in the street, their distinctness tapping in the maze of her sensations. Shutting her eyes, she tried to imagine that she was back in her bedroom at Cheyne Walk; that if she looked she would see the morning sky framed in patterned linen.

The darkness was narrower than ever, like being shut into a black screen.

She tried to think out "to-morrow." To-morrow she would go and settle a job; once she 'd fixed that, she could take a small flat, inexpensive, some little flat in Kensington or Knightsbridge, perhaps. And there was an odd twenty-five pounds in the bank at this moment.

Her mind ached. She must n't let this discouragement get the better of her — a momentary weariness, physical reaction to strain. Determinedly she shut her eyes again.

To-morrow —

III

It was clear to her, as she came out of the offices of Renners, the publishers, that Sir Edgar, despite his kindliness and good-humored interest, had n't taken her demand for literary work very seriously. And his final assurance that she would n't find the job of "reader" at all as interesting as she imagined, had shown her that to him, as to the benevolent shy official at the headquarters of the League of Nations Union, she seemed to be a rather obviously inexperienced young woman with a caprice for "work."

She had to remember — she told herself this calmly — that her money would n't last out forever, and that she had to settle into whatever work she intended to do pretty quickly.

So she must think — think it out, keep on thinking and planning, and getting on with it; keep busy about it; face the facts of the situation and act upon them; think, and plan — and for heaven's sake, for goodness' sake, keep busy. And thank goodness that it was the only thing to do — to keep busy.

For if you stopped —

If you began to feel —

What next, then? Next? For she 'd only just begun. You could n't expect — Literary — political — Lady Blandon! But she would n't, could n't go to Lady Blandon. Lady Blandon's look: "A *paid* job! My *dear* Athene!" Political organizing, even if she got it on her own — she could put no glamour into the prospect.

Umbrellas moved in black eddies up and down Oxford Street. Beneath them myriad bleak paper faces. She marveled distastefully at their jostling.

Journalism — Rosamund Page had done journalism in New York for six months once. She wondered how you

set about it. Influence, probably, like most things in England. Irwin of the *Sunday Chronicle* had suggested to her last autumn that she might edit a society page, gossip, accounts of parties. The notion was ironical now; still, perhaps some other kind. On the other hand, Etty might — there was more art, more scope, in decorating; more need for a certain subtlety of taste.

When she got back to the hotel she rang up Etty Reslaw. The next day they lunched together at Boulestin's. Etty, vague, dissipated, brutally witty, was fundamentally a business woman. She was almost amorously kind to the girl, but when she discovered that Athene could n't produce any capital she did n't hesitate to refuse the suggestion of joining her. She added, however, with a shrewd observation of Athene's features, that she ought to go on the stage.

"You 're simply wasted. Now, my dear, that really is a notion. Go round and see one of the big managers and insist on his giving you a part. If you really need an extra penny I should advise you to do that. And I expect you can act — if you let yourself go. Anyway, quite enough."

"When I was a little girl I wanted to be an actress." The idea crept upon her with a subtle intoxication of her spirit. She thought of names: Duse, Bernhardt; the drama; Shakespeare.

And later in the afternoon, as she sat being manicured, she still reflected upon Etty's suggestion. She would go to-morrow. Even a small part at first. She might get on; make good. And finally — finally Geoffrey would see —

That night she dreamed that she was playing Juliet — the balcony scene. The blue limelight kept pouring into her eyes. He was somewhere down below, down below, under the limelight. She had the feeling of him moving

down among the trees. She kept saying: "It is the nightingale and not the lark"; she kept saying it over and over again, though she was n't sure if it was the right moment to say it, and she could n't remember what came next. Then she could feel him coming up, climbing up to her. But still she could n't see him, because of the limelight in her eyes. "Romeo! Romeo! Wherefore art thou Romeo?" But that did n't come there, surely? Now his hands appeared, wide apart, piercing up in the thick sapphire light. Then his arms. Now his face: the dark brows, dark eyes imploring her, the burning dark sweetness of his look. She was breathing hard. His lips were speaking to her, but his words broke into nothingness between them. She leaned forward. "Romeo, Romeo!" She waited for his arms to close round her. "Geoffrey," she sobbed, "darling! Darling!"

She was sitting upright, staring into the darkness, her arms pressed across her sobbing body.

IV

Stage Door.

She mounted innumerable flights of stone steps. A typist told her to wait. Mr. Dexter might be able to see her if she waited.

She sat down. There were two other women waiting, one of them elderly, the other noisy, with a pert pretty face and a white fox fur. In a corner a young man, with a monocle and down-at-heels shoes, moved with elaborate absorption, surveying each of the signed photographs hung on the wall. Each time he paused he put his cane behind him and seemed to lean on it, as though it were a shooting stick. Once, when he turned to the light, Athene saw that he looked pitifully ill.

Next to her an elderly man held a newspaper close to

his face. His wing collar and pearly cravat diverted attention from his overcoat. He had the profile of a dyspeptic and unlaureled Cæsar. Beside him on the bench lay a gray bowler hat and a pair of soiled yellow gloves.

The typist came in. "Mr. Delauncey."

He rose and took up his gloves and bowler and followed her with a leisurely swagger.

The two women's whispers occasionally broke into shrill exclamations or siphoning giggles. They would look round at Athene and then at the young man, as if they had in some way rather devilishly betrayed themselves, and then giggle again in a more repressed fashion. In the countenance of the elder were blended the pseudo-dowager and pseudo-kitten, and her demeanor flickered from hauteur to playfulness and from coyness to the heights of *savoir faire*. In answer to some murmured anecdote from the girl, she gave unusually clear utterance to the sentiment that it was the "wrong attitude of maind ulltoogethah," and they appeared to fall into agreement in their condemnation of a being featured, with acid or satirical comments, as "She." Every now and then they repaired the ravages of their vehemence with intensive applications of powder puff or lipstick, which they would then stuff back into their handbags, glancing, as they did so, toward the door.

The younger one was summoned, and as she rose Athene noted that she moved well.

"Good luck, my dear," said the elder. Then, very much the dowager, she turned to Athene. "Mr. Dexter's really rathah tahsome. He always keeps one waiting like this." She pushed back her kid glove to glance at her watch. "It's ten minutes to one already, and I have a luncheon appointment at one o'clock."

She shrugged her shoulders under their weight of musquash.

"That's too bad," said Athene. There drifted to her a heavy atmosphere of California poppy.

"They say he's going to send *Backstairs Kitty* on tour in the autumn."

"Who?"

"Mr. Dextah."

"Why — really?"

"Yes; of course one can nevah trust gossip, — people will say anything, won't they? — but I thought I might fancy playing the mothah in that — you know, who objects so terribly to her son marrying a — a noboday."

"I didn't see the play."

The woman looked her up and down, her natural kindly inquisitiveness peeping through her manner.

"Perhaps you were in a show yourself, then?"

"No. I — I haven't had a great deal of experience. I'm pretty well a beginner."

"Come from the States, don't you?"

"Yes." Athene was always puzzled afresh at a discernment of her origin.

"Of course," pronounced the dowager, "that's an advantage in one way, and not in anotheh. There's coming to be quait a craze for American actresses in the London theatah just now; and they tell me in New York they laik English actresses. But of course, if you ask my advice, I should n't tray straight stuff at all. It's terribly difficult to get an engagement. With your figah, and if you can sing at all, I should tray Lewisohn or someone laik that; you know — Revues or Varieties, even a sort of 'snappy line,' thoroughly Yankee, and you might get something. But there's no monay in this — none at all, reallay."

"Miss Lovejoy."

"I hope," said Athene, "you'll have a satisfactory interview."

For a second the "kitten" reëmerged. "Who knows?" She kicked her heel up backward and gave a wink over her shoulder at the young man, who responded not at all. "Cheerio!"

The scent of California poppy hung in her wake.

"D'you know if she's right?" The young man forced a casualness that should bear out the dilettante implications of his cane and monocle. "Is Dexter really touring *Kitty* in the autumn?"

"I'm afraid I don't know at all."

"Yes. Quite. I see. There's a part in that—the young man— Please!" He elaborately bowed. "Please go first. I'm not at all in a hurry. Not a bit."

She accepted his courtesy with an odd compunction.

Claude Dexter, peeled of his stage sunburn and virility, peeled of the personality with which Athene had felt the intimacy that grows in the audience of a customary hero— Claude Dexter was mealy, elderly, a little distracted. Only his voice was the same, rich and incisive.

"How much experience have you had?"

"I used to do a good deal of amateur stuff."

He dismissed the statement.

"You haven't had any training at any of the dramatic schools?"

"No."

The telephone rang.

"Excuse me." He took up the receiver. She watched the hyperemphatic play of his expression as he listened.

"Yes? Yes? The doctor says it isn't measles? That *is* good. How is she feeling? Good. Very well. I'll be home about five, I expect."

He put down the receiver. She discerned a genuine relief behind his instinctive portrayal of it.

"I beg your pardon, Miss Reid. My little girl hasn't

been well, and I was most anxious to hear what the doctor said." He reverted to their conversation.

"The fact is, Miss Reid, that it's impossible to get on without experience or training. So many girls are trying the same thing and"—he made a gesture—"it's no earthly use. If you'll forgive my saying so, there are any amount of pretty girls who go round to managers to-day, and frankly, we don't want them. The profession's overstocked as it is, and of course the girls without training have the least chance. I should advise you to go to a school for two years. Then come back to me." He rose, held out his hand. The movement revived for her his peculiar stage charm.

She thanked him for his advice.

As she crossed the landing, she glimpsed the young man, straightening his tie in front of one of the signed photographs.

V

The second weekly bill at the Amberley Hotel amounted, with extras, to eight pounds, fifteen shillings and sixpence. Athene looked at the items of the extras—fires; early morning tea; laundry; teas; wine. That was nearly nine pounds for one week, excluding what she must spend every day on taxis and buses, and she took fewer taxis now.

She examined the stubs of her check book. There had been that bill she'd forgotten to pay, for having her fur coat remodeled in the autumn; that was sixteen pounds. Then the two weeks here came to more than fifteen pounds altogether; and two checks to self for five pounds. That was—she did the sum on her blotter—forty-one pounds, four and tenpence. Forty-one pounds! That meant not much more than thirty pounds left. And she'd

have to draw out another five pounds to-day. Cleaning and repleating those two skirts had come to eighteen and sixpence. She looked at the extras again. Wine for dinner was expensive — she had n't thought when she ordered it; it had been welcome after long, tiring days in and out of theatres and newspaper offices. And laundry. She wondered if eleven shillings were much for one week's washing. She found that she wore two pairs of stockings a day, walking about the streets; and you needed clean things every day, going into dirty-looking offices, sitting in crowded buses.

Thirty pounds left.

Even at the rate of ten pounds a week, by April she 'd have nothing unless she sold out; and she did n't want to go and ask Sir Philip so soon.

Nothing! She tried to realize — and could n't. And now, even if she wanted to go back home, she believed that even "second class" was over thirty pounds. And anyway she did n't want to. She wanted to stay; to be in London. She told herself that it was the only practical course, to stay in London. She found herself bound by a tenacity that was as much intuitive as willful to this leaden monotony, this gradually frightening routine of looking for a job in London.

At moments she was genuinely afraid, not so much at the hypothesis — which it was difficult to regard except as hypothetical — of being soon without work or money, but at the stupendous loneliness which had descended upon her in a city where, a few weeks before, she 'd felt herself the centre of so much social and sociable activity. It was as though in that quarter of an hour's drive from Cheyne Walk to the Amberley Hotel she 'd crossed an illimitable territory and got out in a city whose structure resembled the London she 'd quitted, but whose population was strange — utterly different.

The crowds, formerly mere tides of humanity, providing, as it were, the moving element in a scene she surveyed, had become the element in which she herself moved, still consciously, still strangely, yet with a more and more lucid awareness of the actual human beings moving with her.

It was with these diverse strangers that she struggled into the Underground, or competed for a seat in an omnibus; it was with the men and women who crossed the street with her, in front of blocks of traffic, that she found herself competing as she waited for an editor to see her, or hung about a theatrical agency, or bided her time at the premises of an educational bureau, only to be told that an American degree would n't obtain her a teaching post in England.

Her former life had been bound up with individuals, its fabric elaborately spun from emotional and intellectual relations, its pattern developed as a conscious and beautiful manipulation of these multicolored sensations and reactions. Her virtues had been in the fulfillment of what she would leisurely conceive as rightness; her adventures had been fortuitous or deliberate projections of psychological situations. Her every movement visibly, subtly, modified the pattern or touched a new glint, a new shade in the gossamer.

Now her movements provoked no reaction — as though the fabric had been cut off, the pattern broken. And a new stuff of life, narrow and hard, and, as it seemed to her, without color, was evolving itself in the frame of circumstance. She saw herself in the crowd of human beings, yet drawing nothing from them. Their collective existence seemed, in the fortnight since she 'd left Cheyne Walk, to have closed round her in a wall of blank yet palpitating oblivion.

But, though she saw now with a painful vividness that

she was "in" the crowd, she felt herself in it as an inadvertent spectator recoiling instinctively from the common touch. She realized these human beings, but she neither liked nor disliked them. They were, in fine, a part of what she had to face. They were part of her new circumstances, and it was the quality of her fortitude that she should accept them, as she was coming to accept the unexpected obstacles to her purpose, with an oddly Puritanical conviction that they were "for her good." But it never seemed to her, even in theory, that she was "of" them.

She slipped her check book back into her bag. Then she went down to see if there were any letters for her. The little man at the *Mirror* had said he might give her some fashion notes to do. He'd promised to write if he could fix it up.

There was nothing from him. A short letter from her mother, saying that things were "pretty bad," but that they hoped to be able to keep on the house for the sake of appearances. With momentary irony Athene wondered what her mother would say to the "appearances" of the Amberley Hotel. Appearances! Bluff! The Braytons had done the same thing when they lost their money two years back; "hung on" with the idea of pulling through. Then obviously they could afford — something.

But an aggressive streak of independence lit in her. She would pull through by herself, somehow. Her small face was resolute, her eyes thoughtful.

She remembered reading somewhere that people under economic pressure had no time for tragedy; that their unhappiness became subordinate to the rhythm of necessity, moaning an occasional syncopation.

She folded her mother's letter and went in to dinner.

The soup had the same gravyized aroma; the fish, the same cochineal sauce.

"No wine to-night."

The reminder brought her to the conviction, already nascent in her mind, that the Amberley was unjustifiably expensive, and that she must move to a cheaper neighborhood.

VI

She came out into Queen Victoria Street.

The same questions: Experience? Training? The impeccably polite staff of the impeccably decorative offices of an Anglo-American magazine syndicate could do no more for her than the more brusque potentates in the grubbier, narrower precincts of Fleet Street.

Athene crossed the street and began to walk eastward, hurrying without purpose. The wind stung her mouth and eyes, and whipped a strand of her hair from under her hat.

She felt empty with humiliation. Looking into the faces that passed her, she began to wonder: How did they all live — earn? She began to think of them all as "earning units," units supplying a demand.

Faces that were no more than pinkish discs of identity. A two-legged uniformity of buttoned-up overcoats and bowler hats, or brief-skirted feminines. Grist to the mill; food for the incessant machinery of the city. Incredible uniformity; incredible drabness of eye. A pageant of the humdrum.

She went into an A B C, and ordered a glass of hot milk. The waitress wiped splashes of tea off the marble table. She had a small waist and an air of independence bordering on the insolent.

Earning units — even these waitresses. A quality that seemed to depend neither on brains nor initiative, worth nor honesty, that might embody such attributes, yet rest

on quite some other basis; a quality distinct, indefinable —the power of earning.

The waitress planked down the glass of milk. Athene laid her fingers round the glass and felt the transmission of warmth over her whole skin.

Experience. Over and over again it came back to that. That, anyway, if you had no other accredited stamp of ability. While these units were gaining their experience, paying their premiums of youth and leisure, she had been receiving nectar-like draughts of culture from mistresses imported from English universities, or horseback riding over the Virginian countryside, or organizing theatricals —theatricals, while the young actresses who took those parts that she could n't command traveled about to dirty lodgings in provincial towns. Reading Rupert Brooke in a hammock, or dancing the nights into dawn, while slow-dropping experience was caught in long hours and nominal salaries.

She sipped the hot milk.

Either you must earn or be earned for. The door was opened as two people came in, and the cold air rushed at her from the street.

Did the whole world revolve on the face of a dollar?

She seemed to perceive all her standards, all her ideals, grown, like her father's orchids, in a specially created atmosphere. Hothouse ideals, a luxuriance that could n't be exposed to the elements.

She wondered whether anything mattered to her at this moment except to find work.

A newspaper, left behind by some previous occupant of her table, lay on the chair next to her. She picked it up at the casual glimpse of a column headed "Wanted." "Milliner wanted; a girl with experience."

Her glance flickered down the column —hesitated— and halted.

"Wanted, mannequins. Apply 269d, Regent Street, Thursday 2.30–5."

Thursday, two-thirty to five. That was to-day. She looked up at the clock. Five to one. She remembered Etty Reslaw's phrase: "With your looks"; the elder woman waiting to see Dexter that day: "With your figure." She flushed suddenly, but her practical sense didn't question her decision. She asked for her bill. Twopence halfpenny. She rose, leaving a penny for the waitress under her plate.

As she went out, she looked in the mirror that flanked the entrance, and as she looked, her reflection flashed upon her consciousness like a sudden symbol of all the changes that she'd dimly felt working in her and on her during the last unbelievable three weeks. She saw that she looked plain. Her lips were dry and pale, and the east wind, which had dragged down a strand of her hair so that it looped dankly against her cheek, had whipped a pink stain on her eyelids. The steam of the hot milk had made her nose shiny. Her whole face had an indecisive, pinched air.

She'd always taken her beauty for granted. Such factors as care and warmth and security had been so much in the daily routine that they had never occurred to her as being its tributaries. The power of her looks had been as unconscious yet implicit in her mind as the influence of her money. And the two had been blended in that personal radiation describable only as her — perfectly modest — assumption of position. It had never come within the region of her understanding that east winds or anxiety could disturb the surfaces of her charm.

She passed out into the street again.

Her throat felt thick; her eyelids smarted; the muscles of her mouth and chin jerked against her control. As she crossed the street she was still haunted by the shock of her own reflection — pinched, plain, with that indefinitely

battered look she'd observed on the faces of girls crowding home in the Underground after office hours.

She got into a bus. There was only standing room. A man got up and offered her his place. She thanked him, momentarily warmed by his courtesy.

"Where to, please?"

"Piccadilly Circus."

"Tuppence, please."

She held out the two coins.

A phrase, a tag from her childhood, bobbed incongruously, like a strip of orange peel, on the turgid tide of her thoughts: —

"My face is my fortune, sir," she said,
"Sir," she said —

It was n't a question of vanity. She instinctively disapproved the notion of personal vanity. Her toilet had never been more to her than a matter of habit and convention, her dressing a pleasant duty; a matter now — she acknowledged the situation with simplicity — of necessity.

"Sir," she said,
"Sir," she said —

A beauty specialist? A guinea! And there was n't time. Her mother had always gone to a beauty specialist once a week, ever since Athene could remember. She recollected a phrase of Rosamund Page's: "Fixing her face." A phrase; a process. Most of the girls and women she knew did it. Without any intent of prudishness she had been moderate, a little distasteful of the *maquillage* they labored to produce. It had been, perhaps, with a certain deliberate fastidiousness that she'd kept to her moderation.

She stared out as the bus jolted up Lower Regent Street. Suddenly she had one of those stabbing hallucinations. She thought she saw Geoffrey.

When she got out and went into the Piccadilly Hotel, she still felt as though her heart were banging at the back of her eyes.

She went down into the ladies' cloakroom, temple of pink velvet and mirrors and washbasins. Faces leaning nose to reflected nose; figures turning, posing, attitudinizing to reflected figures. Each woman intent, wrapped in her own consciousness. One woman, at a farther dressing table, possessed by a very agony of toiling vanity, blackening each eyelash.

Athene bent to wash her hands. The lavatory attendant, typical whaleboned, ample-skirted member of the melancholy sisterhood, brought her a towel, and then sat down again in a Louis Seize white chair and resumed her newspaper.

A woman with white coat lapels, garnished with a bunch of artificial violets, gradually forced herself to turn from one of the tables, putting down a hare's-foot in a drawn-out gesture of finality, but even as she turned she gazed back over her shoulder at the incarnadine simper of her own lips.

Athene took her place. She leaned to the glass. Her speculation vaguely pursued the fate of that simper, the man waiting for the savor of its rehearsed eclosion. The men . . . She had never allowed herself to dwell, except in a brief chord of universal pity, on such women. The white-slave traffic had come to her in the fumigated guise of a "question," a "problem." But her mother's answer to youthful questioning had continued — like a text hung in the schoolroom, which she 'd never dreamed of removing — to dictate her attitude to the individual aspects: "These are things, dearie, we 'd rather not think about." There had been in Mrs. Reid's philosophy a veritable black list of the things that one did not, because one would rather not, think about. Poverty had been one of them.

Such women, living by the physical — Athene took up the hare's-foot and began to daub a faint, careful color on her cheeks. Mechanically she powdered her nose and chin. She took off her hat and began to do her hair. She looked at her watch. Quarter to two — 269d, Regent Street. . . . That was better; one looked better now. What would it be like — a job like that? What kind of other girls? A lot of society girls did it now; but others too, every kind of woman. She remembered various scraps, intimations, things Rosamund had read about mannequins. But that was all over now — some old-fashioned book.

And yet — did n't that come pretty near earning by the physical merely? With a gesture of haste she found herself dragging on her hat and adjusting the waves of her hair. Confusedly she saw her own look — that would n't meet hers. The inhibitions of her mind jerked her logic from the gaping bitterness of its conclusion.

She put on her gloves, took up her handbag. That was better; she looked all right now. Yet she hardly saw herself. She hurried out of the cloakroom, past the gold-braided porters. She looked for the numbers; it must be higher up Regent Street.

She felt herself scurrying, the traffic roaring and creaking past her. Two-thirty to five — 269d, Regent Street.

"My face is my fortune, sir," she said,
"Sir," she said,
"Sir," she said. . . .

VII

The lift bore her up six stories.

The oblong room was carpeted with gray and ornate with sky-blue paneling in cream walls; through a series of windows the light fell on groups of femininity dis-

posed on sofas or chairs or standing herded toward a farther door.

When Athene came in, she was conscious of every glance slewing in her direction. When she sat down among the throng, she began to realize that each new entry magnetized a momentary curiosity, and stirred afresh the air of pervasive, genteel hostility. The movements, attitudes, glances of each woman betrayed a hint of the feline; and, save for those who obviously hunted in couples, arriving together, keeping shoulder to shoulder, each gave out to each a mistrust as instinctive and unconscious as its predatory origin. Each, while emphasizing by a disposition of expression or body her own advantages, sized up any points in her rivals, her observations, triumphant or otherwise, never causing her to relax a superficial pose of detachment.

These currents and cross currents moved the more freely in a silence scarcely stirred by whispering, and emphasized by the orchestration of the traffic down below in Regent Street; and as the room became more and more packed, the currents flowed with a more and more electrical influence. Athene could feel glances moving over her face and clothes. After a time she found herself examining her neighbors, summing up their appearance, speculating as to their value, their chances. It seemed incredible that there should be so many respondents to one small advertisement, so many of such different types. Types varying between a large, blowsy, painted creature wearing trodden-down shoes and a moleskin wrap, and a little woman with the air and demeanor of a country school-teacher.

The inner door was opened. A man's voice said:—

"Will you all come in here, please."

They began to press and buffet toward that door as if the room were on fire.

"Steady, ladies, please — steady."

A little man with pouching eyes sat judicially at a table opposite them. Beside him stood an elderly woman, who counted the girls as they came in and occasionally bent to listen to his whispered comments.

"Have you done a great deal of this — work before?" Athene asked a fair girl who stood beside her.

"Fair amount. I was at Fragonard's in Bond Street last autumn. Then I thought I might get a bit more in wholesale, like this."

"Then this is wholesale?"

"Yah, didn't you know?"

"Will each of you ladies walk up to me in front of the table, and turn round, and then I shall say which are to stay and which are to go."

There was a general stir, hair-patting, rapid powdering of noses, straightening of jackets.

The woman beside him turned a tired glare on the crowd.

"You come first." She nodded to an undersized girl with a curl glued on her forehead below a close-fitting purple hat. The girl advanced toward the table, one hand on her hip, jerking her body from side to side.

The man looked up at his aide-de-camp and shook his head. He dismissed the girl, and she departed with the same jerking, conscious gait.

The next took off her hat as she advanced, to display an ebony Eton crop and dangling earrings. She was told to stand on one side.

"That means they'll consider taking her," murmured Athene's companion.

The next two were slender, one of them with a peroxide prettiness, the other with a smile which she directed during her inspection at her judges. She was asked to wait.

There followed a young woman untidily dressed in a fawn suit and a pink blouse. She had a figure of resilient curves and highly colored face and hair, and her movements fairly swaggered vitality. She turned herself about with an air of insolent abandon, and then faced her judge and stood with her hands in her pockets, waiting for his decision.

A thick, warm response woke on his face. Without taking his gaze from hers, he said, "You can wait. Stay here by me," and indicated a chair. She sat down.

The candidates continued to sway or wriggle or undulate their paces up to his inspection. Most of them were dismissed. Athene's companion went up. She moved self-confidently and with simplicity. She was bidden to take off her jacket. After looking over her form, the man told her to remain. As she stepped aside, she turned and made a little satisfied grimace at Athene.

Athene found herself advancing to the table; the man's little fish eyes scrutinizing her, running to and fro over her face and body; they gleamed a faint interest. The woman beside him stared too, with her tired stare.

"Just walk back again," he said.

Automatically she obeyed. She was conscious that he whispered to the woman. As Athene turned to approach the desk again, she saw the woman shake her head.

"Ever done any of this style of work before?" asked the man; his interrogation reserved a vague, meaning amiability.

She replied frigidly that she had n't. She knew that he was offering her a chance.

"Mmm," he said. Then, as his meaning glanced off her aloofness, he snapped: "We don't want anyone without experience — thank you." The "thank you" was a lick of sarcasm.

Athene went out.

By the lift a group of girls and women were conferring, already devoted to one another in their common adversity.

They greeted her with a concert of smiles.

"*You* going to Shaftesbury Avenue at four-thirty?" one of them asked her.

She shook her head, puzzled.

"Sharp's the thing I mean," the woman amplified. "They've got some trials for a ballet that's going to tour next month."

Athene walked down the six flights of steps. Her thoughts and feelings were shaking as from a physical humiliation, writhing as if they'd been obscurely contaminated. But her resolution was only hardened by the nature of her rebuff, made more sensitively obstinate by the perception of the strata of competition to which she'd come.

It was no longer — she paused and stared, unthinking, into Liberty's windows — it was no longer a question of what was congenial, or interesting, or suitable, or even dignified. One's necessity knew no laws of sensibility.

Two women got out of a car; one of them was lovely, soft-eyed, eager. They dismissed the chauffeur and hurried into Liberty's. Athene looked at them and turned away.

She would go to Traville and ask him if he could give her a job as one of his mannequins. As a former client, he might — to oblige her.

VIII

Mr. Traville, by his name and by an effervescence of pernickety gesture, alleviated the cockneyism that twanged in his sentences and betrayed itself, by a peculiarly British timbre of snobbery and vulgarity, in his

manner toward his clients. Where a Frenchman might have been a little, unashamedly amorous, Mr. Traville indulged in a certain rude familiarity, and his small pale eyes would glisten on either side of his ratlike nose, and the gestures of his wrists and ankles jerk the more ecstatically as he congratulated a débutante on the style of one of his gowns, or blamed a duchess for her posterior proportions. He possessed in a frock-coated degree the bullying-servile temperament so rife in the upper grades of the sartorial profession. While one eyelid flattered the possible patron of a model, the other eyelid would threaten the creature called to display its perfections. In business morals he was no worse than his confrères, trading on the feminine belief in the potency of Parisian origin and in the profitable reactions to suggestion of novelty. On the æsthetic side of his calling he had the virtuoso's consciousness of being an artist, and cultivated a tradition of erratic inspiration, often ringing up his clients to tell them that their dress or suit had "come" to him suddenly, in the night — a theory not easily compatible with his nocturnal diversions.

In his interview with Athene his manner, after a preliminary jolt from the suave to tersity, modified itself. He accepted her suggestion with a hint of understanding women's fads; and when she added, consciously directing the influence of her former prestige upon him, that she must of course be adequately paid, his mind had so far envisaged the attraction of her presence — discreetly rumored, for she had enjoined her maiden name and forbidden any question of publicity — that he proffered three-pound-ten a week. She acceded, for it didn't occur to her to bargain; and Mr. Traville closed the encounter with the pleasantry that one could always do with a little pin money, couldn't one, Mrs. Graham? — accompanied by an indefinably lewd intimation of his com-

plicity in the obscure and, it was more than possible, delectably doubtful nature of her affairs.

The next day she went to inspect a room near Notting Hill Gate, advertised at thirty shillings a week, bed and breakfast (gas ring). The landlady, who came to the door in a jumper suit of puce artificial silk and felt slippers, let Athene in, though her lips, in admitting that she was Mrs. Parrott, didn't lose their suspicious twist, and her eyebrows remained dimly peaked.

A fat fox terrier yapped from a doorway.

"Jimmie, go in at once," Mrs. Parrott yapped back. The animal darted in, and as they passed the door, Athene glimpsed a bald man reading a newspaper. She stumbled after the landlady up the narrow staircase.

"This is the bathroom, with the geyser. Sixpence extra for each bath."

From the bathroom issued a dank, sootish smell.

The bedroom, when they had accomplished the two flights, was, despite its wall paper of shadow roses on an ox-blood ground, unexpectedly innocuous. It was lit by two tall windows, and the chintz of the curtains and bedspread looked clean. Mrs. Parrott pointed out the gas ring. Athene had never thought of the amenity of gas rings. "The girl brings your breakfast up here." Mrs. Parrott indicated the table, covered with a cloth of peacock-blue serge.

"And could I have dinner here if I wanted to?"

The myriad small lines drew themselves up round Mrs. Parrott's narrow, glassy eyes. She paused, looked down at Athene's shoes, looked away again.

"Mm— That'd be pretty well full board, wouldn't it?"

"Well, not luncheon."

Athene thought the room compared favorably with her bedroom at the Amberley and agreed to the land-

lady's forty-five shillings. That would be twenty-five shillings over.

Next day she left the Amberley Hotel and established herself in her new quarters. The fat fox terrier yapped while the taxi man was bringing in her luggage.

The following morning she took a bus from Notting Hill Gate to the top of Bond Street. Bond Street looked odd at nine-fifteen in the morning. The women bustling along its pavements had a synthetic elegance, the same models carried out, as it were, in a cheaper material. They seemed chill, faintly scared foreshadows of the lustred realities.

She presented herself at Traville's, going in by a side entrance as the portals were still shut. She was early; the other girls coming in glanced at her with spasmodic interest as they took off their hats and coats, and talked to one another in tones still tainted with sleep.

"Old T. was on the ramp yesterday," said one of them. "Those pyjamas have n't come from Paris yet."

"My dear, you would have *died* — when we got there — the police raided it only the night before *last* — "

"Christ! There 's a ladder already, an' I only put 'em on yesterday; 'ole proof! I *don't* think — "

IX

Mary drew back as the waiter whisked away her plate, but did n't take her glance off the letter.

Geoffrey's eye dwelt on the white ruffles that fell round her wrists, the veins winding their way in faint blue streaks up toward the hollowed palms. But he was n't thinking about her.

He started. The impact of her words reached him before their sound.

"Patricia seems to be coming home earlier than she ex-

pected." She folded the letter, and slipped it into the workbag which she'd laid on the window sill beside their table. "She sails on April twenty-first — that's a fortnight to-morrow, isn't it? Yes, to-morrow's Wednesday — and goes to Cherbourg. She means to stay in Paris with Denise Lemaire for a few days."

"It'll be good to see her again." His words seemed to die away from lack of volition. He turned and stared out of the window. Beyond the awning of the verandah was a sunlight so glaring that it seemed artificial; a sea so hard in its blue iridescence that it was inconceivable a ship could cleave a path in its surface. The balustrade patterned the length of the terrace with dumpy purple shadows.

"Perhaps," Mary pursued, "you might stay in Paris a day or two and meet her while I go on home. Father wants me to be back to go down to Devonshire with him for a week before Parliament opens."

"I'd rather not. I want to get back to work."

For a minute she wondered whether to speak. Then she said: —

"You know Dr. Read urged you to stay away as long as possible. And since Lomax has taken over your lecturing — "

Still he was staring out of the window. He allowed himself to be hypnotized by the rigid brilliance of the scene. The polite villas; April; it became strange and painful for him that this was April — this poster world; flat color plaques; fierce angular structure of light. He imagined the sweetness of rain.

He said: "I'd rather go back, Mother."

"Very well, darling. We ought to see about reserving our sleepers soon." When his face was tightened up like that, jaw set just perceptibly forward, the lower lip pressed upward, she saw him walking beside her down

a long platform, ostensibly choosing a carriage in the train that was to take him back to school. When he looked like this, it seemed to her that to bear children only became an agony when they began to feel: when their pain held you, helpless.

"Yes," he said, "yes." He watched the couple at the next table rise; the woman was still laughing at something, bending back her head, rippling her sun-browned shoulders.

"How divinely comic!" he heard her say.

A perpetual tinkle, an incessant subdued clatter, an aroma of cooking, a murmurous distillation of voices, filled the shadowed enormity of the dining room. As the meal progressed, an atmospheric complacency spread over the tables, and the peace of food seemed to enclose even the tail-coated conjurers who had been its ministers.

Geoffrey pieced together the scraps of his attention.

"I think I shall go into Cannes and see about them this afternoon."

"Them?"

"The reservations."

She reflected that the concierge could do so. But a momentary relief came to her from the notion that he should do anything so definite.

"Perhaps you'd see if you can get me the Paléologue."

"The *Russie des Tsars?*"

"Yes. I haven't tried at the place the other side of the Casino. You might try there."

She remembered his saying at Christmas that he wanted to read it.

"I will." For a second his dark gaze rested on hers; clung to hers in a sharp spasm. Then his voice clicked down like a shutter: —

"It's three volumes, isn't it?"

They saw each other faintly blotched with pallor.

They were both shaking, as though they'd drawn back from the edge of an abyss.

"Yes. Two volumes in the English translation, I believe. I think," she added, "that we might have our coffee in the lounge."

The sunlight plunged over him as he came out with the parcel of books under his arm. He began to stroll along the promenade of shops, his attention turning mechanically into windows or registering a reflex flicker to the passing of brightly colored hats or high-pitched voices.

He caught sight of himself in the window of a *parfumerie:* a tall young man in white flannels, with a sunburnt jaw, the rest of the face shadowed by a panama hat. Through his reflection he saw bottles of scent of various shapes and sizes, arranged in a pyramid of which the summit, an amber flask, glinted through his breast pocket as though it were his essential spirit.

He strolled toward the Casino. The throng moving up and down its wide steps looked like a film crowd, staged to represent a world of luxury and fashion in a popular Continental resort. They reflected every facet of glamour — wealth, cosmopolitanism, gayety, dissipation. The demimondaines looked like demimondaines — as did the less professional ladies. The men looked as if they either drank too much, ate too much, or spent too much.

The women's clothes, the men's figures, the kaleidoscope of faces, breathed the vulgarity of riches untrammeled by any obligation save pleasure — a simple, unconscious vulgarity, such as might have beamed from the features of Circe's swine. To Geoffrey it became preposterous that these corpses should be allowed to fulfill a condition called life; that they should flaunt their

mental and spiritual death in a seeming of vitality, in this *danse macabre* of their carnal shrouds.

He began to wonder how long ago their spirits had died. A few of the faces still bore the imprint. In others, such as the woman passing now, her features a pattern of mouth and shadows, it seemed as though her senses had long ago throttled all other being. In the man mounting the steps now, any sensitiveness, any impulse of intelligence, must have been stillborn.

And yet, were these, after all, such paragons of evil? Was their grossness, after all, more than a veneer laid by his imagination over a throng of fairly typical, largely English and American, wealthy holiday-makers? Weren't they, perhaps, more ordinary, more perfectly respectable, than his overstrung nerves had perceived? Weren't they, in fact, quite typical citizens of typical strata in the upper classes, typical material of a society honeycombed by their activities — a society stimulated by their wealth and encouraged by their demands? Weren't these smart women and golf-playing business men and politicians the pillars of society, the examples and generals of progress?

The battle of progress generalized by corpses, increasingly, as wealth increased in disproportion to mental consciousness of responsibility. The upper classes of the social order filled with men and women who had spiritually died in childhood, in infancy. A world constructed, reconstructed, by men gutted of vision or sensibilities, ideals, sympathies. New generations begotten by dead parents.

Suddenly, coming out of the Casino, Geoffrey saw Denis, with him a girl in a yellow hat, drawn down helmet-wise, over her eyebrows.

Geoffrey turned on his heel and began walking quickly in the direction of the sea. Denis!

He paused, leaning against the back of a seat, staring out to sea, clutching his parcel.

He was n't aware how long he 'd stood there when he heard Denis's voice.

"Excuse me, Graham — "

Geoffrey faced him. Denis's expression reacted in a startled hint of sympathy, swiftly obscured.

"I must speak to you for a moment. Since Fate — "

Geoffrey was about to turn away. Denis's presence was a door hideously flung open on a locked room.

"It 's about your wife," Denis said.

Geoffrey stood still. "How dare you — "

"I should like, in case the fact 's of any value to you, to make it perfectly clear that Athene never — " he hesitated — "never had any but the most honorable intentions toward me."

"I refuse to discuss — "

A faint scorn, a hint of pity, streaked Denis's tone. The breeze blew the lock of brown hair across his forehead.

"As I gather you may have separated on a misunderstanding, I feel I owe this perhaps tactless insistence to you both. Your wife's behaviour, though hardly compatible with reason, was perfectly compatible with her marriage vows." Denis twisted a smile. "She more or less ran away from me. I had a dreadful bother sending her luggage back." He broke off; his greenish eyes fixed themselves on Geoffrey's face.

"You won't let yourself believe me; you think the story does n't hold water."

"Damn you!"

"Very well. I don't intend to harrow you much longer; the process," he interpolated, "is n't giving me much pleasure either. But trading on the suppressed discernment of a novelist, Geoffrey, let me assure you that

the only conceivable cause for Athene running away, and dragging me with her as a kind of Platonic last hope, was the fact that she was in love with you and at cross-purposes with you at the same time." Denis hesitated. "After which Samaritan detour," he said lightly, "I shall rejoin my companion."

Geoffrey turned on his heel.

The girl in the little yellow helmet was waiting for Denis on the lowest step of the Casino.

"Il est beau, votre ami, hein, Denis?"

"You think so?"

She screwed up her eyes after Geoffrey's retreating figure, pursed up her chin and lips.

"C'est un type un peu"—her gesture sought the adjective with finger and thumb joined—"un peu romanesque," she announced.

X

Mary got up, and put on her dressing gown, and listened. Through the door that connected their rooms she heard him step out on the balcony.

She waited, automatically retying the ribbon that bound back her mass of silvered hair. She heard him come back again into the room. Then there was a muffled creak of springs as though he'd thrown himself down on the bed.

She looked at her traveling clock. It was twenty to one. She'd lain, listening to him moving about his room. Her limbs ached as though she'd been moving with him.

She tapped at his door.

He was sitting on the bed in his shirt sleeves. All the electric lights were on, and the writing table was littered with sheets of note paper, several of them marked with a few words.

She said, "Would n't you like some aspirin, darling?"

He shook his head. His black hair was rumpled back from his brow and his skin had a damp, matte appearance. From under his black eyebrows his look covered her with a vague, sombre resentment. He stared at her as she sat down in the armchair.

Then he dragged himself up again in response to the impulse that could n't let him rest, and once again went out on the balcony.

"The stars are clouding over," he said. His voice seemed to echo out into the spaces of the night. Then he turned back into the room. "Perhaps I 'd better shut these," he said. "It 's too cold for you."

Framed by the darkness, the pallor of his features and shirt gave him the look of an apparition.

"I 'm not in the least cold."

He went up to the chest of drawers and turned over a book that lay on top of it. He remained staring at the back of the book cover.

"I saw Denis Mortlake this afternoon — "

Her finger tips pressed on the arms of her chair. She waited.

After a pause he gave her an account of what Denis had said.

"I suppose," he concluded, "that I 've known it really all the time. I suppose I knew that evening, when she came and found me clearing up my papers. Only I hardly knew what I thought or felt that night. And then, in a way, thinking it over, I did n't want to believe her. There was a kind of horrible simplicity in just leaving the whole thing at the fact that she 'd cared for Denis. I suppose it was a kind of mental cowardice; it seemed to shift the responsibility from one's self to circumstances — and, in a way, to her. And yet, at the same time, it 's never been out of my mind for a moment

that, whether she were Denis's mistress or not, I had been fundamentally responsible."

He sat down on the bed again, leaning forward, gazing at the carpet. "I was beginning to see — before it all happened —"

Mary made herself speak.

"My dear! It was my doing."

Suddenly she was seized by a purely personal instinctive longing for him to say again, as he'd said that evening when she'd told him of her outbreak to Athene, that he didn't too bitterly accuse her. She wanted him to make her feel, as even in the tensity of shock he'd been able to make her feel that evening, that at least he didn't accuse her with the bitterness that she felt toward herself.

He looked at her with a queer, remote indulgence.

"Mother darling, what you did was only a liberation. It would have been worse — to go on as we were then."

She saw Athene as she'd come in that afternoon, a little flushed with hurrying, her clear sweetness of lips and brow. And yet — that lurking sufficiency, that intonation of completeness, which had suddenly stared at Mary as a completeness blandly excluding Geoffrey's sensibility. She saw the savagery of her own outbreak. She saw herself in the grip of a passion she hardly recognized as her love for Geoffrey, her longing to protect him — a passion that distorted her mind, her words, her love itself. The maternal beast, fighting, protecting; the maternal beast, sheer creature, sheer instinct, unreasoning, violent, pitiful.

"You still care as much for her —" She let her words trail off, neither statement nor question.

"Nothing else matters to me at all," he said.

"You've heard from her?"

"No. I imagine she's gone back to America."

"Clifford saw her with Mrs. Reslaw at Boulestin's about three weeks ago. I did n't tell you."

"With Etty Reslaw?"

"Yes."

He looked astonished, yet his astonishment seemed only on the surface, his next remark bringing out his essential reaction: —

"Then she may be still in London."

Mary answered abstractedly: —

"I suppose so." She was trying to envisage the results of the reunion that she saw flaming painfully in his imagination. If Athene were to come back — and would she? Did she value their marriage enough now? Or, if she did care, would her pride allow her to be, as it were, "accepted" after all? If she were to come back, would n't it all be just the same, except that Geoffrey's every nerve and feeling would be more than ever enslaved by his wife's unconscious, unassailable egoism? And yet, — Mary's vision struggled with the implications of Athene's conduct, — had she, after all, been wrong about Athene? Unfair, not only in those blind minutes when she 'd felt her words hurting stupidly, incessantly wide of the mark, but essentially unfair? From the beginning? Had Athene, after all, cared for Geoffrey? Loved him more than the girl herself realized? Was her very reaction to her mother-in-law's words, her flight itself, one of those violent manifestations of a whole process of emotional development, of a whole painful spiritual adolescence?

She remembered Athene as she 'd come in that first evening at Yoxalls, with Geoffrey at her shoulder. Athene, eager, wondering almost, holding out to them all her limpid friendliness, her confident affection; coming in and feeling, yes, surely feeling — she remembered the scarcely perceptible constraint that, in the first half hour,

dawned in the girl's manner — an unexpected quality in the way they received her — a quality so elusive, so secret, as to be indefinable, an element that in some way qualified the completeness of her welcome; an unconscious element, unconsciously English, deriving from a tradition founding its friendships on the accustomed and its affections upon customary association. Had n't she perhaps expected a different warmth, a more elaborate expansiveness?

And, looking back, Mary seemed to see Athene, so like and yet so utterly unlike themselves in her Americanness, received without the spontaneous intimacy of habit, yet with none of the positive consideration, the enlightenments, the allowances, accorded to a "foreigner." Their mutual tongue made her differences of outlook and understanding, of education and tradition, seem odd, seem to be deviations from the English, rather than variations on the American. And in their perceptions of any oddness which arose from their positive consciousness of accepting her and treating her as one of themselves, they 'd managed to be in innumerable small ways unfair and inconsiderate, viewing her Americanism rather as an eccentricity than as an illumination of her being.

"I think we none of us understood her, Geoff, I least of all, when I ought to have realized —"

Her words startled him from his thoughts.

"She used to say that I did n't —"

Mary interposed with quick, thoughtful justice: —

"Yes, but she did n't mean what I mean now. That was her way of trying to express a general feeling she had that *she* did n't understand either. What I mean is that if we 'd all" — she hesitated — "taken more trouble, she need n't have had that feeling."

"I know. How I must have spoiled it for her," he said. "She came over," he added slowly, "like a child

setting out on an adventure. It was rather the same with our marriage, I suppose. She made you feel she'd read about life in a book of fairy stories with colored illustrations, and that she hadn't the least doubt it was going to be like that. And yet I never had even the perception to try and help her to understand what it *was* like without losing her — her sort of hopefulness."

Athene's spirit, young and bewildered, hovered between them.

"You must write to her, Geoff, or go and see her."

He made a broken gesture.

"Why should she come back?"

Mary was silent. She said at last, turning her gaze to his: —

"I think she'll only come back if it's worth while for both of you that she should come back."

"I don't understand."

"I mean, if she loves you."

Again they were silent. And as they sat facing each other they became aware of footsteps in the street below, distant, then coming nearer; a man's voice singing, a honey-thick Southern voice caroling spasmodically into the night. The steps passed under the window, echoing on the cobbles; then the voice again, rich, sweetly, lazily inebriate, the words wrapped in the confused lilting mazes of the tune.

The footsteps died farther and farther up the street; the last tones of the voice were lost.

It became clear that there was nothing more that they could say to each other. And as Mary rose to go she saw that her presence and her words had been able to give him nothing: that he was inside a world of his own pain, and that nothing she could do or say could pierce the shadows that whirled about him like smoke within a crystal.

She kissed him good night.

When she had closed the door between them, he hardly knew that she had gone.

XI

THE man held up the brooch and examined it through a small magnifying glass. Then, still examining the sapphire, he asked:—

"How much d'you want for it?"

To Athene it seemed incredible that she should part at all with the little brooch she'd had ever since her tenth birthday. She remembered her father putting his hand in his pocket: "Well, girlie, your old Poppa has n't forgotten your birthday either"; the little oblong blue leather case; opening it—

"Forty pounds," she said.

"I'm afraid we could n't give you more than fifteen. You see, the setting's old-fashioned. And there's very little demand for sapphires just now."

Athene gazed vaguely into the recesses of the shop. Fifteen pounds. She'd thought at least thirty-five. She had an impulse to take the brooch back. But that mackintosh—she'd had to have it—and that thick pair of shoes had taken more than last week's money at Traville's. And this would get an eiderdown for her bed as well as filling up the exchequer.

The man peered his way into a screened department at the back of the shop, and reappeared, counting over some notes.

"That's ten"; he put down the note; "and here's five, four, three, and two—thank you." He looked like an old army officer: an ascetic build, a white moustache, thick glasses. As her fingers took up the notes, she experienced a poignant, momentary sense of well-being.

Crossing the Buckingham Palace Road, she wondered with an irony that was almost humor, what her mother would say if she knew that her daughter had sold her last brooch in a pawnshop, and moreover, that her daughter should find advantage in the fact that pawnshops opened half an hour earlier than fashionable dressmakers.

She doubted if her mother had ever envisaged a pawnshop save as a part of that "dreadfulness" which was the aura of all poverty, a dreadfulness not exactly reprehensible, yet of such a complexion, of such a contour, that the eye turned from it; turned as from a facial disfigurement which really should n't — in public —

That, Athene pondered, was how people like Mother — so many wealthy, well-meaning, unimaginative people — thought of poverty. They were sorry for it in theory, terribly sorry; and when, in fact, they ever saw it, they were sorry and yet filled with a confused sense of the outrageous — not against the existence of poverty, but against its sudden appearance in their sight; a disfigurement to be hidden, decently hidden. It never occurred to people like Mother that, but for the grace of Capital, they too — that the thousands of sheltered women indulging in their little virtues and weaknesses, enjoying their little tastes and talents, might by a small accident of circumstance be equally disfigured, equally offensive to the sensibility of the kind-hearted.

It did n't occur to them, it had never occurred to one's self, that the condition of being without money was a possibility latent in every human being.

She passed Buckingham Palace and across the Mall. She recollected — in another existence — driving in through those gates. On the other side of the railings the daffodils challenged the frail sunshine. Southward, across St. James's Park, the houses were a rim of smoked-pearl silhouettes.

One had always thought — her brows were drawn down — that there were "the poor" — poor people like the women she'd worked for at the Welfare Centre, and the middle classes, and one's self — the world had seemed to be classified that way. It had never for one moment transpired that the middle classes, which, while not the poor, were never one's self, weren't more or less immune from real poverty.

Real poverty. She made the distinction thoughtfully. For there had existed, side by side with the conception of the poor, a realization of a poverty by which even the richest were perpetually menaced, a kind of comparative poverty, a condition liable to fall upon the most innocent, of being obliged to dispense with luxuries which should have been necessities. Those conditions of comparative ruin, which she could realize now, had overwhelmed her family.

She considered the situation without bitterness. She knew that they were mentally almost as afflicted by their restricted scale of expenditure, and by the apprehension of a still more restricted scale, as the victims of real ruin by physical deprivation.

She crossed Pall Mall and hurried up St. James's Street. She was late; and yesterday Mr. Traville had spoken to her, with insinuating good nature, because she'd been late once last week. "Of course, you've only been here ten days, Miss Reid, but rules are rules, and I like my girls to keep to them."

Even as she flushed at the memory of his tone, she reflected how queerly ordinary, natural, this way of life was beginning to seem. Getting up in the small, chilly room; lighting the geyser for her bath; snatching her breakfast; hurrying for the bus; then the long, the interminable day, standing about, suddenly being called on to show a dress, then another; then more standing

about, talking quite naturally with the other girls, perceiving, as one talked, the varying and yet uniformly oppressive quality of their lives — their men; their homes. One of them had a baby, which she left in a friend's flat all day. Cleo Lord hoped to get back into some chorus in the autumn. Another, Gloria they all called her, thin, gold-haired, nearly six feet high, was being housed for the time being by a North Country timber merchant, who had come to Traville's a year ago to buy his wife a fur coat. Gloria's height showed off furs to advantage.

The days passed in a curious, variegated monotony: Every now and then a spasm of apprehension that some woman she knew would come in and see her; and yet she'd faced the contingency before, and determined that that too, the pride or whatever it was prompting such a fear, was among the irrelevancies, the mental luxuries, that she couldn't afford.

And six o'clock coming like a release; then an overwhelming realization of weariness, and the struggling, packed journey back to Notting Hill Gate. And Mrs. Parrott bringing up her supper, all cluttered together on a black tray. And then the long evening, when the drug of work began to wear off; when, as the half hours went by, a longing gripped her, fastening down on her whole mind with a cumulative pain; when her mind and will could no longer defend her; when she would lie down, her whole consciousness crying out for sleep, and sleep was denied her, until at last physical exhaustion would induce the sleep that her mind couldn't command, and she lay breathing in its approach, gulping down the first dense wafts of oblivion.

XII

[*Geoffrey Graham to Athene Graham*]

HOTEL MARITIME
Thursday

I *have* written innumerable letters to you in the last twenty-four hours. They all come down to two facts: firstly, that I've been unjust to you, in particular and in general. I was beginning to realize that in a kind of helpless way some time ago. Secondly, that if you could forgive me I believe that our life together could still become what you've always positively wanted — and I, by a kind of temperamental laziness exactly opposed to your attitude, have wanted and yet imagined could come by a policy of psychological *laissez-faire*.

I don't know where you are now. My dear, let me come and see you! I return to London next week. My dear!

GEOFFREY

[*Athene Graham to Geoffrey Graham*]

April 10

GEOFFREY DEAR: —

It isn't very hard for me to read between the lines of your letter, and what I see there makes me answer that I'm not going to respond either by seeing you or by going into everything that's happened between us. This could only be very painful for us both.

I have been mistaken and stupid in many of the things I've done, Geoffrey, since our marriage; and my eyes have been opened since I left you, in many ways; and some of what our mother said to me that day was perfectly just and true. But just because I am getting a few real values I know that I can't consider coming back to you, or seeing you. It would be too real for me and too unreal for you — now.

Please believe I appreciate your motive in writing me the way you have, Geoffrey, and my refusal is the measure of how much I understand and am grateful to you.

ATHENE

[*Geoffrey Graham to Athene Graham*]

I don't understand. What can you read between the lines, my dear, except that I want you so terribly to come back, and yet don't feel justified in asking you? For heaven's sake let me have your address! I understand nothing from your letter except that you are unhappy. My dear, let me see you!

[*Athene Graham to Geoffrey Graham*]

Your note only makes it clearer. Won't you try and understand that I don't want you to pity me? I don't want to see you, and see you being sorry for me and wanting to "make it better again," as if I were an infant that had fallen down and hurt itself. Seeing you would n't make me any happier. What you would be "justified" in asking for would be some kind of a separation, and of course you can let me know about that through my solicitors.

ATHENE

XIII

"MISS REID! Miss Reid?"

Mr. Traville's nasal tones pierced after her.

"Yes, Mr. Traville."

"Miss Reid, I want you to come here. Yes, in here. I want you to try on this—"

She followed him into one of the gold-and-white fitting rooms. He had a dress over his arm.

"This is that new model I was talkin' to you about the other day, *Enchanteresse,* you see, with the new hip line, and the drapery from the left shoulder, and the *diamante* here and here. Rather marvelous, I think. Now just slip off that tea gown, because I want you to show this one. I had you in mind when I was designing it. Rather your coloring. Now hurry up, I've got Lady Blagdon coming in any minute now and I want her to see it. Hurry up."

"Very well. I'll slip it on if you'll leave it."

Her hint seemed to touch on an aspect which had n't remotely occurred to him.

"Now, my dear, don't be absurd. Don't be squeamish with me — come along." He was impatient, yet as he looked at her, her point of view seemed to prick him to a more personal interest in what had n't to him been a "situation" at all.

"Now, my dear, don't be so fussy." He laid the dress across the chair and began to unfasten the shoulder of her tea gown. She drew back. His eyelids narrowed.

"Now, then, really, Mrs. Graham — " He was half insinuating, half malicious, yet still superficially playful. His fingers caressed her upper arm with enough grip to prevent her easily withdrawing again.

"Please go out while I change, Mr. Traville." His hot hard little fingers closed round her arm above the elbow.

"Please go."

He chose to be still lightly insinuating. "I'll go if you'll promise to come out to supper with me to-night."

She still managed to control her speech and stood neither yielding to nor resisting his grasp, her whole will directed to the giving out of a detachment that should so belittle as almost to ignore his behavior, so that he might still, as it were, withdraw his move and by so doing regain their former relation.

"I'm afraid I don't go out at present, Mr. Traville." But his vanity, as much as his simpering brutality, was challenged.

"You refuse to obey me?"

"I'll put on the dress if you'll leave me."

He let go of her with a delicately snarled "Very well, Mrs. Graham; you need n't trouble to come back to-morrow." He banged the door open, and she stood staring at his retreat up the pink-carpeted staircase.

Then she closed the door and began to take off the tea gown. One of the saleswomen looked in.

"Mr. Traville says, will you hurry and get that dress on — there's a customer he wants to see it."

In the showroom Lady Blagdon sat on a sofa and appraised the dress through a *lorgnon*. Athene remembered hearing of her as a third-rate concert singer who had engaged the fancy of a widowed soap manufacturer.

". . . These lines would be just too perfect for words on you, you know — only of course the girl has n't bothered — " Mr. Traville skipped up to Athene and jerked the hem of the frock downward — "to put it on properly. Tell Miss Fearnley she's to wear this model in future, Miss Reid. But you can see, Lady Blagdon — takes away that broad look which is so middle-aged, doesn't it? Turn right round, Miss Reid."

Lady Blagdon's emerald earrings tolled negation.

"I want something much more important-looking."

"Fired" was what the sympathetic Peggy had called it. "Is n't it a shame, girls, Reid's been fired. Old T.'s in one of his nasty moods to-day."

Mechanically she pulled down the blinds, went over and lit her gas fire. The bluish flames turned to yellow and from yellow glowed to orange.

Fired —

She could pay Mrs. Parrott this week. Two weeks' laundry still owing, and the shoemaker's at the corner, who'd heeled those brown shoes.

She'd have to sell out anyway now; telephone to Sir Philip Rosenheim; go to him perhaps, and ask him to sell those shares for her.

And then?

Home? Washington?

She recollected a phrase in her mother's last letter:

"Things are still terribly difficult. Thank goodness there 's only our two selves now, and you 're provided for, even in a humble way." Home in the atmosphere that impregnated her mother's letters, an atmosphere of pretension haunted by panic, an atmosphere of perpetual social bluff. "I had a premonition Mrs. Clay was n't going to ask us to her second dinner, but thank the Lord the card came this morning."

She could n't, would n't, go home yet.

She took an envelope from her handbag, and out of it Geoffrey's two letters; they were soiled, and the ink blurred in places.

She held without unfolding them, and, holding them tightly in her right hand, she thought for the hundredth time how he must have touched the paper as he wrote. She tried to see him, feel him, feel his thoughts, feel the density and tension of his consciousness as he wrote.

But she could n't. She knew nothing of him.

In all those months together, far off, unbelievable months together, she 'd never — she saw that now — tried or realized that she ought to try to know him. Side by side with him, she 'd been content to turn and note what was no more than his shade thrown by the light of her imagination, big or small, sombre or dim, according to the momentary angle of her fancy; its antics pleasing or displeasing, having always for her the quality rather of acting than of action. With the real Geoffrey so close to her, she 'd dramatized his very words for her play of him, and accepted even his kisses from the mouth of a shadow.

Now neither shadow nor reality remained. Geoffrey who 'd loved her, and whom she 'd blindly and dully never known how to love, was in the past as his love for her was past. And now he pitied her; and she knew him no better, yet loved him.

He wanted her to come back. But her impulse to give in, to go back, the longing to see him that overcame her like a sudden physical weakness, always resolved itself to a recoil — a recoil from the idea of his compassion perpetually tormenting her.

XIV

Sir Philip listened without comment to her request that he should sell out for her at once.

"Perhaps," she added, "you'd heard of my father's — difficulties?"

The eagle lids lifted over the topaz eyes. "Yes." He was silent again. Then he asked, "Would you think it — indelicate if I were to put a question to you?"

His elbows rested on the arms of his chair; the tips of his fingers met in an apex.

"Not at all, Sir Philip." His remoteness, his quiet, gave her an extraordinary sense of his sympathy.

"You —" He paused. "I naturally," he interpolated, "have heard a little from Veronique."

She met his gaze.

"Yes. Please go on."

"You accept nothing from your husband?"

"No. He doesn't know — I mean about my father's affairs. I don't wish him to know."

She saw how completely he understood.

"You don't mean to go back to America?"

"Not yet — anyway. I had a job, until lately."

The ivoried yet poignantly live features betrayed an admiring interrogation.

"I tried for a heap of things," she continued, "and finally I got a job as a mannequin."

The lids lifted and dropped again.

"The head of the firm and I had a disagreement."

"Yes, I see, perfectly. Shall you try for another job?"

"I'll have to. That four hundred or so won't last me forever, and I thought maybe I could buy myself into some sort of a small dressmaking business. And anyway, even if it wasn't for the money side of it,"—she heard her voice breaking a little hysterically from her restraint,—"I think I'd go crazy if I didn't work every day."

"My dear child—" he jerked off. "My dear child!" His tone nearly broke her control. She stared hard at the calendar on his desk.

APRIL
20
TUESDAY

"Can you type, Mrs. Graham?"

"Yes."

"Would you consider taking such a post in my office?" He seemed to reflect. "We need another typist."

She felt herself grow hot.

"You do really?"

"Yes." His abrupt sternness deliberately overruled her. "At four pounds a week," he added. "Do you accept that?"

She thanked him a little unsteadily.

"You'd better begin to-morrow then, at ten o'clock." His smile glinted softly and died out again.

"You won't say anything to anybody?"

"Naturally not, Mrs. Graham. But may I say to you," he ventured, as he opened the door for her, "how very much I admire your courage?"

And then he shut the door swiftly after her, for he saw that she was crying.

XV

At the Gare du Nord, Patricia bought a paper. Her compartment was so crowded, entirely with English people in a mental condition varying between resentment and excitement, that she could scarcely spread her arms to open the paper. The information hadn't changed from the preceding day — the general strike continued, all transport services had ceased, all newspapers were suppressed, letters, telephones, telegrams.

She wondered whether John could possibly have got her telegram. She'd promised to let him know when she returned. Amid the conflicting rumors of strike conditions in the last two days, she'd imagined a telegram would be more certain.

The porter took her tip. As his hands withdrew mechanically into the pocket beneath his blue blouse, his stare lingered on her.

"C'est vrai qu'on fait la révolution à Londres?" His stare shifted for a moment to the paper in her hand, then to her fellow passengers, whose nationality seemed to invest them too with a novel glamour for him.

The question issuing from his stubbly moustached countenance had an air of sober fantasy.

"J'espère que non."

Patricia, still holding her paper, gazed out of the window. The exclamations, conjectures, murmurings of her fellow passengers became gradually irrelevant, remote. She was trying to feel what it would be like to see John again.

The train stopped at several stations, and railway officials disputed at the windows or in the train corridors whether there would be any boat at Calais. References to *la grève* were hurled about with a plenitude of imagination and gesture.

At Calais, despite an army of argumentative yet mainly pessimistic porters, it was finally conveyed to the passengers that there would be a boat in two hours' time.

At Dover the quay was thronged with undergraduates in gray flannels and blazers, swaggering, jostling, pressing forward ready in their rôle of porters to spring to the gangway.

Patricia stood holding on to the railing. A youth with red hair and a muffler took her suitcase.

"Yes," she said, "possibly I'm being met."

She followed him to the quay.

Suddenly she saw John quite close to her, the other side of a hatbox. There was an almost unbearable tautness of time before they could reach one another.

They could n't speak.

The red-haired youth said:—

"Shall I take the luggage out to where the cars are?"

She was conscious of John's voice saying, "Yes." As they followed up the quay and along vistas of platform, he took her hand.

"Darling!"

She could only look up at him, and look away again, and hold tightly to his hand.

When they got to the car, she was distracted by a ludicrous little problem. She drew John aside.

"You don't—tip these national saviors?"

His laugh was momentary, half-painful relief.

"No." They glanced at the youth's red head bent over the luggage carrier. "He's a rowing Blue," John added.

She laughed too, and felt her laughter tugging and threatening at her whole system of control, and stopped abruptly.

"That's a ripping car you've got!" The youth looked at John with honest admiration. "A twenty-five model, is n't it?"

She could feel how, in a moment, John relaxed.

"Yes. I bought it last summer. It's wonderful on hills. I took it to Scotland and barely had to change down the whole time I was up there."

The youth nodded. Patricia observed how complete was their momentary understanding.

She got in beside John. As they drove out through the gray, narrow streets, she thought of his wife Peggy, sitting beside him so often, like this. She felt a distaste for the big, smooth beauty of the car.

They found themselves in a queue of vehicles all heading for London — Fords, limousines, carts, vans, tricycles, all stacked with luggage or parcels, small two-seaters crammed with passengers, saloon cars, chauffeur-driven and haphazardly filled with men and women and children. A car in front of them stopped and picked up a man uneasily carrying a suitcase on his bicycle. Every now and then lorries thundered past with white lettering, FOOD, chalked on their sides.

She told him about the people in the train. It was a relief to her to hear her own voice making sentences.

"They talked about Soviets," she said.

"That's simply the panic of the people who haven't seen it and been in it. The public are incredibly mild and good-tempered. Of course there is feeling among a portion of the strikers. Yesterday I drove some police down to an oil dump near the docks and they threw bricks at us." At a sound from her he added, "They didn't touch me. One of the constables got a nasty knock."

Their conversation drifted away over the surface of their consciousness. She found herself watching his hands on the steering wheel.

On either side of them a quiet greenness of fields under a dull sky. Plum blossom was a flare of white in the hedges. She began to feel as if she weren't awake;

the jolting of her heartbeats became submerged by a layer of physical resignation to the rushing of air against her face and the green, steady rhythm of the countryside.

His words shook her:—

"It was like coming alive again to get your telegram."

"I—I didn't know if you would—"

"I haven't said anything yet—to Peggy."

"Where is she now?"

"She—" he hesitated—"we're all down at Stilling."

"That's Sussex, isn't it?"

"Yes. I thought we'd see her about it together—after I'd intimated, of course."

After a pause Patricia said: "I'd rather see her alone, when you've seen her."

She wondered why she should so definitely want this. She had a vague apprehension that somehow John being there might be unfair—an unfair pressure. She was obsessed by the sense that there must be in the whole situation a deliberate rightness.

"Very well."

"I think I'll drive down and see her, at Stilling."

"You still care?" He looked ahead, on the road.

"Yes."

"*Really* as much?"

"My dear!"

As they neared London, the stream of vehicles grew more and more dense. In the suburbs they began to meet occasional buses.

Patricia found herself staring at the first one. The driver, a man in plus fours, was flanked by two policemen. The front of the bus was garlanded with barbed wire. Two of the windows had been smashed and boarded up.

"Where shall I take you to?"

"To my sister's flat, I think." She gave him Bobs's address. She didn't want him to come to her studio.

She found herself impelled by a careful, passionate formality, as if by her care she might somehow buy the favor of Fate.

In a block on Vauxhall Bridge he turned to her with a queer beseeching violence.

"Darling, darling, you mean it?"

She saw that the apprehension that she could neither perceive nor exorcise had touched him too, and made him afraid.

The traffic roared and creaked round them.

She looked into his eyes, giving him in that second the whole of her heart and mind and spirit. Her lips painfully framed the words:—

"You know that I mean it."

The block began to move forward. The car jolted as he let in the clutch.

XVI

Patricia entered Bobs's small drawing-room to find Bobs and her father evidently in the middle of a disagreement. Both were red in the face, and appeared, from a breathlessness of demeanor, to have been simultaneously talking and walking about. When Patricia came in, each was standing with hands behind the back and shoulders squared. It had struck Patricia in the hall that Mrs. Thrale looked anxious.

Her entry startled them both.

"Why, *Pat!*"

"Gracious me! My *dear* Patricia!"

Bobs flung her arms round her sister's neck.

"Pat! How nice to see you! We've had such consultations about you! We didn't think you'd get back—Jeremy wanted to arrange to meet you. And Mother said your letter from Paris was so vague about really coming to-day that we just waited."

Sir Charles kissed her on both cheeks and then held her at arm's length, and then patted her shoulder.

"Well, well, this *is* a surprise!" His tone was gruff, but a little shaky. He did n't take his glance off her face, but kept on patting her shoulder. "Well, my dear, I *am* glad to see you. Glad you got back, very glad. Did n't think you would — These damned strikes. But we shall break 'em all right. Well, well, you 're not looking so very fit either. Bit peaky. Journey, I expect; pretty uncomfortable, I expect; these damned strikes. Well, this is good. We must ring up your mother."

"Then you can telephone?"

"Bless you, yes. Country is behaving magnificently. Magnificently. Everybody comin' up to scratch."

Patricia saw Bobs redden again, flash an apparently renewed defiance.

"Is Mother at Yoxalls?"

"Yes. Got her grandson down there," Bobs said. "I sent him and Nanny down because the Park 's shut up to keep lorries in — and milk supplies."

"You 've got a nurse for him, then?"

"Yes. I 'm doing some journalism, so we 're rather plutocratic just now."

"You 're thinner, Patricia." Sir Charles took in with a troubled sensation the tired shadows round her eyes, the firm, unhappy set of her lips. He felt vaguely that something was wrong. She felt his scrutiny, the sympathetic, bewildered scrutiny of an adoring dog. It hurt her. She tried to imagine how he would take it, this business of John.

"I 'm only tired from the journey, Father."

"Well, well, we must get you home and make you rest, my dear."

Patricia sat down, and took off her hat, and pushed back her hair.

"Where is everybody? What's everybody doing?" Already John, his look, his voice, seemed utterly unreal, unbelievable.

Bobs leaned with the back of her shoulders against the mantelpiece — a trick of Jeremy's.

"All defending the great British public against the 'wicked revolutionaries.' Clifford's driving trams in Hull; loving it, of course. Jeremy works in the day as usual and is a special constable at night; Geoffrey's driving a bus, he started yesterday; Veronique's sorting letters in the post office, while her brother incidentally is backing up the strikers."

"Damned young traitor! And his mother's one of the staunchest Conservatives in the constituency. She backed me splendidly last time, splendidly. Can't understand the boy. Must break his father's heart."

Patricia looked from her father's scowl to Bobs's troubled gaze, and remarked: —

"Sir Alfred's fairly liberal-minded. He probably understands."

"Well, I don't, and I never shall. Why any man who's been decently brought up should go and mix himself up with a lot of Bolsheviks — " He broke off, glancing at the clock. "Well, I must get back to the House. Wish you'd heard the Home Secretary's speech yesterday, Bobs; magnificent. Put the case in a nutshell."

Bobs's square little chin, so exact a miniature of her father's, emphasized an obstinacy that was rather a reaction from his views than a genuine expression of her own.

"I read it this morning in the *British Gazette*."

Sir Charles kissed Patricia again. "You'll ring up your mother, won't you?" He turned to Bobs with a gravity betraying perplexity as much as censure.

"You think over what I said to you, Bobs. If you can

take sandwiches out to Jeremy at one o'clock in the morning, I don't see why you can't do your bit yourself."

"Yes, and say, 'God bless the Tory Party and a twelve-hour day.' And anyway," she added with a relapse to affectionate tolerance, "'a woman's place is in the home,' Father."

When he had gone, Bobs turned to her sister, and amplified with her conscientious frankness: —

"I suppose really I don't approve of the strike any more than Father does. Only just when I'm certain that Jeremy's right, and that it is illegal and a — a monstrous coercion of the public who can't help it, then I suddenly feel how rottenly the coal owners have behaved, and what muddleheads Father's old Government are, and I feel glad that they're being shown up by such a definite move."

"Geoffrey condemns it, apparently?"

"Yes. Though as a matter of fact I think he's glad of something that keeps him busy and wears him out."

"Yes. I see. Has he heard anything of her?"

"I don't think so. He never says, of course. And Mother never talks about it since she came back from Cannes."

"Rotten business it is. I wonder what really sent it wrong."

Bobs sat down cross-legged, and spoke with conviction: —

"They ought to have had a baby."

Patricia couldn't help smiling.

"As an expert, you advocate babies?"

Bobs nodded.

"Yes. As many as you can afford, of course, and at reasonable intervals."

"Yes —" Patricia broke off. "D'you miss yours just now?"

Bobs ran her forefinger across the toe of her shoe.

"Mm. Quite a lot. Of course Achilles is a great consolation," — she glanced to where an immense gray-woolly hind leg was visible at the end of the sofa, — "but I find myself getting really jealous of Mummie's having the infant. I suppose," she added, "that the maternal passion is such an insidious one because it's so — sublimated. You find you've got it without realizing — " She saw that Patricia was abstracted, leaning her chin on her hand with an air of intolerable weariness. "What's the matter, Pat?"

"Nothing."

"Didn't you enjoy America?"

"Very much."

"Did you have a bad crossing?"

"No."

"What is it then, Pat darling?"

Patricia shook her head.

"Nothing."

Bobs seemed to ponder. Then she said solicitously: —

"I expect you ought to marry."

Patricia looked at her sister. Bobs's expression was serious, anxious, her brows raised under her straight fringe. The little unreasoning stab of pain was over.

"And live happily ever afterward?"

Bobs's smile didn't stir the depths of her seriousness. She nodded. "Yes."

A door banged outside. Achilles sprawled to his feet. Jeremy burst in, enormously cheerful.

"Why, by Jove! Patricia!" His greeting, his inquiries, radiated a benign pleasure. Finally he turned to Bobs.

"I was awfully lucky to-day, darling. I actually got a bus from the City to the Strand. And at Charing Cross I got a lift from a marvelous little feller in a 1908 Renault, who told me he traveled in sewing machines."

XVII

ATHENE finished the second letter, pushed back her stool from the desk, and rose to take the papers in to Sir Philip.

He looked up.

"Here are those letters."

"Thank you."

There was a step outside; the door opened. Alfred, holding the door handle, his untidiness oddly in contrast with the oval of his face and the compactness of his body, looked from Athene to his father. His hesitation was arrested volition. Even as he came forward to shake hands with Athene, his manner seemed a curb on a perpetual straining of his will. His father held both his hands.

"I am glad to see you, Alfred!"

A glint of defiance faded from the boy's look.

"Are you? Really?"

"Why not?"

"You know I've been spending the last two days encouraging this 'menace.'"

Sir Philip offered his son a cigar.

"We all follow the dictates of our consciences."

"You think I'm intolerant? You get nothing done unless you're intolerant. Unless you feel violently, your conviction — which anyway has to filter through layers of other people's scepticism and stupidity — loses all compulsion before it gets to a stage of action. Believe in, preach, revolution, and you get reform probably, sooner or later. Believe in reform, and you get 'moderation.' Believe in moderation, and you do — nothing." Alfred puffed vehemently at his cigar.

Sir Philip turned to Athene. More than ever he made her think of a dark, gentle, small eagle.

"Is he right, Mrs. Graham? The way of progress is paved with good revolutions?"

She wondered whether he were, remotely perhaps, a little compassionately, laughing at them both.

Alfred interrupted:—

"As a means, and only if they're inevitable. Nobody except the Socialists of Tory imagination wants a revolution—merely revolutionary results. The strikers don't want the strike, obviously, but the results. It's a question of the efficiency of the means to win with. To restring an old racket has a certain effectiveness; on the whole, to get a completely new racket is better."

"But more costly."

"The end is worth it. Socialism in our time is a workable proposition, as workable as capitalism in yours, Father. It may be costly to get it quickly, but—"

There was a knock at the door. Miss Crick looked in.

"Excuse me, Sir Philip." She blinked toward Athene. "If you're coming—"

"Yes, of course. Thank you."

Alfred opened the door for her.

XVIII

Patricia drove in through white gateposts. The drive was narrow, flanked by laurel bushes, and opened out on a sweep of gravel in front of a low white house, whose roof had been sufficiently weathered to add a charm of maturity to an already pleasant design. It had the air of having been successfully built, thirty years before, to fulfill requirements of charm and comfort. Its windows, flung open to the afternoon, seemed to breathe in sunshine and exhale, at the same time, an unassuming and permanent hospitality. In the ground-floor windows lettuce-colored curtains stirred in and out with the breeze.

Patricia had expected something more — she found she could n't decide more *what,* but anyway less, infinitely less, simple.

She rang the bell, and stood waiting on the semicircular steps. She was calm, as if her imagination had suddenly become locked. She could n't conjure up what the interview was going to be like. Her will kept battering little phrases on her locked imagination — John's wife; the girl he married; John's house. John was cardboard, John's house, the step under her feet, was cardboard — no taste, no substance.

The parlormaid in brown-and-white starchiness.

"Is Mrs. Napier in?"

"Miss Graham?"

"Yes."

"Mrs. Napier is out, miss, but she left a message asking if you would wait. Master Malcolm," the maid amplified, as Patricia entered, "cut his knee open and Mrs. Napier had to take him off to the doctor."

"I see. Yes." Malcolm? John's wife taking John's little boy — which one? — to the doctor.

"Is Master Malcolm the elder?"

"No, miss. The youngest, miss."

The girl left her in a long, light room, peopled with cretonned settees and armchairs. On the various tables were photographs. On the writing table was a photograph of John, in khaki. On a low little table next to the fireplace was a photograph of John's wife in her wedding dress. At the far end of the room, a portrait of a girl in a riding habit, holding her hat and gloves. The dark background of the portrait showed off her fair, vigorous prettiness. The face expressed a candid vanity, tempered by youth and good spirits.

Patricia sat down. That face, with its complacency and brightness and faultless health, troubled her like an

unshaded light. Gradually it awoke an animosity, jarred her imagination to life. She felt a spasm of biting physical jealousy.

The lettuce-colored curtains stirred; beyond them the trees and garden and turquoise sky had the imperturbable quality of a picture postcard. There were three doves basking on the top of a dovecote. Their cooing seemed to melt from sound into sunshine.

"Oh—" a slender, uncertain voice.

She turned. A little boy in a mauve linen suit stood in the doorway, staring at her with odd greenish eyes.

"Are you the lady Mummie is expecting?" The emphasis came on the last word.

"Yes, I think so."

He approached her gradually, never taking his odd, dark-fringed eyes off her face. "I see." He sat down with polite deliberation on a pouf and scratched the back of his knee.

"I'm afraid Mummie's had to take Malcolm to the doctor, because he fell down when we were getting off the toolshed by the wall at the back, and hurt his knee. I expect Vickers told you." It was apparent that he had come to entertain her.

"Yes. She said something about it."

"I expect Mummie will be back by four. I don't know what it is now, because I can't tell the time yet, but when I can Daddy promised me a watch—or, as a matter of fact, he said he expected anyway I would get a watch when I'm six—that's in September. Is it a long time to September?"

His face was sun-flushed, eager. His grubby hand pushed back his brown hair.

"It's over three and a half months," she said. His likeness to John was so exact, so poignant, that she felt it as a kind of menace. John, with an untarnished eager-

ness, with a smooth brow and sweet, delighted mouth — John with the whole of life set out before him —

"Is three and a half months a long time?"

"It depends." In three and a half months, John and herself . . .

"Please, what d'you mean, 'it depends'?"

"I was talking nonsense. It's a longish time I suppose."

He seemed to reflect upon this, his eyes holding the light, his nostrils curved.

"Is a week a long time?"

"No."

"Daddy went away, and when I asked him he said probably he would be back in a week, and it seems as if he'd been away a pretty long time now."

She couldn't answer.

He persisted. "Should you think to-morrow would be the end of a week?"

She shook her head.

"I don't know, darling. Perhaps."

"Oh, dear!" he exclaimed, with a sudden awe, gazing at her face. "What is the matter?"

His tone was half frightened, yet shaken with sympathy. "Oh dear! Have you hurt yourself?"

Through her tears she was aware of him getting up off the pouf and coming to her. He stuffed his handkerchief into her clenched hand and stood close to her, his awe giving way to a bewildered solicitousness. "Have you hurt yourself? What *is* the matter? If it's your canary died, Nanny says nobody really dies, an' they all wait in Heaven. An' I'll give you one of mine, 'cause my new one is nesting and there'll be young ones. You see, Daddy gave me two —"

Suddenly she said: —

"I've got to go. I don't think I can wait, after all."

With a kind of agony, she caught him in her arms and kissed him. Then she found herself going across the hall and out of the front door. His voice piped something after her, but she could n't look back.

That night she wrote to John.

He adores you; and he has a right to you. Besides, I know you care too, though you don't want it to weigh against me. He has a first claim. I should never, never forget him, even if you could, even if we had some of our own. If I did n't love you so much, he could n't have made me decide. You are lucky, I think.

From our own point of view there was perhaps — was n't there? — more to be lost than gained. Love between a man and woman, as it ought to be, the mixed-up hyphened thing love-marriage, is n't born, but grown. Something you create more and more, as you grow together. There would always have been a kind of reservation or handicap for us. I think I 've known this all along. Perhaps it 's a mark of my age, but I have a sort of obsession about right and wrong, and what one, because of a certain amount of privilege, can't do. I have a horror of the second best, a sort of idealism that has no particular merit and is often cruel and unreasonable — what I 've talked to you about before as the fitness of things. What we 'd planned would be an infringement; I 've seen that finally now. Don't write to me.

PATRICIA

XIX

MISS CRICK's fiancé put Athene down, as he 'd done the day before, at Marble Arch, and again she was obliged from her heart to Miss Crick and to her fiancé. He lifted his hat, and his pince-nez glinted as he nodded.

"So long. Cheerio!"

"Hope you 'll get the bus all right," said Miss Crick, and they drove off up the Edgware Road.

Athene crossed to the bus stop. Already a crowd was waiting under its umbrellas. She put up hers. Two buses went the wrong way. She thought of Alfred Rosenheim and what he'd said yesterday. Possibly he was right. But she could only feel herself one of the unjustly inconvenienced public that had to get to its work and get its living, and could n't afford to take long, abstract views.

At last a bus. Mechanically she began to press and jostle to the pavement's edge, putting down her umbrella. It drew up. The impulse of the crowd pushed her in. She made her way to a front seat.

The bus creaked and jolted forward. She took out her threepence.

"Notting Hill Gate," she said to the young man acting as conductor. She had a feeling of luxury. Outside it was raining, and yesterday she'd had to walk from Marble Arch. The pavement was thick with pedestrians. Every now and then private cars would stop and take one or more of them in. Several of the cars had PICK UP, or some suburban destination placarded on the windscreen. She turned her gaze from the road to the backs of the driver and the policeman next to him. The policeman had a jovial face, which was turned to the man driving. She found herself studying the driver's overcoat: a brown overcoat; the collar was turned up, revealing a darn where the coat must have got torn. She stared at the darn.

She looked up to the brown felt hat; its set tapped an obscure emotional reflex; the jar ran through her. Her bus ticket fluttered to the floor.

The man next to her bent and picked it up. "Your ticket," he said. She thanked him with a nod.

She leaned sideways, straining to glimpse the line of the driver's cheek. He turned his head, and she saw the

forehead, the black eyebrow, the modeling of the cheek bone — Geoffrey!

She sat back, pressing her hands together. The glass was between them, and she saw her head and shoulders dimly reflected in his back. The darn scarred her forehead. She was seized by an impulse whose violence seemed to break against the glass and shatter it to a myriad nervous fragments.

At a stop people crowded to get in. He turned round, and his face was within half a yard. She was rigid, twisting her fingers more tightly together. Then, with a further turn of his head, he saw her.

Their looks met. She saw his face like a mask, taut, pale, with a grotesque intensity.

The policeman tapped him on the shoulder. The bus went on.

At Notting Hill Gate she got out, stepping blindly to the pavement. She found the policeman's face twinkling down into hers.

"The driver," he jerked his thumb, "would be obliged for your address, miss."

She gave it automatically, and realized that he turned away with a wink. A sense of the fantastic closed down upon her, choking her ability to feel. She turned away. The bus, scarlet, elephantine, was too grotesque, too unbearably queer.

When she got back, she went up to her room, and took off her coat and hat, and lit the gas fire.

Then she sat down and waited, staring at the door. She could n't think.

He did n't come until nearly ten o'clock. Mrs. Parrott looked in, her face seamed with disapproval.

"A gentleman to see you, miss," she threatened. He pushed past her. He stood in the middle of the room,

looking down at her; then the room still seemed to fascinate his attention; then he looked down at her again.

"What are you doing here?" His tone was feverishly impersonal.

"I live here." Her eyes were on his face.

Again he looked round at the walls, the iron bedstead, the scraggy carpet.

"Why?"

She framed the words:—

"It suits my—convenience."

"I don't understand."

She rose and stood with her back to the fire.

"You don't have to," she said. She wanted to be calm; to show him that she meant to meet him casually, without strain. But she could n't take her look from his.

He made himself speak slowly:—

"You can't afford anything else?"

Her chin tilted up with a hint of that defiance that he 'd known.

"I work; I type in a city office."

"You—?"

"My father had to stop my allowance, a little time ago."

"He— Then why the hell did n't you tell—"

She dragged her gaze away, and stood with her hands in her pockets, looking through the pattern of the curtains.

"It 's no worse than heaps of girls. I do quite well."

"My dear—" Do quite well. The phrase broke in on a whole aspect of her.

She said, "It was very—strange, seeing you this way—"

He cut in:—

"Why would n't you see me? Athene—"

"I told you. I wrote you."

He saw her, small and tired, her beauty stained by her tiredness.

"I behaved unbearably. I could n't see."

She shook her head.

"It was I who could n't see." Her face was averted.

"Do you — hate me?"

She shook her head, her face still averted. She struggled.

"It must be sort of — queer, driving a bus." She so wanted for his sake to resolve the situation to some kind of normality.

"I refuse to leave you like this. You 've got to accept my providing for you, even if you don't want to see me."

She flashed a white face on him; her voice was half savage, half piteous. "I don't want you to be kind to me; the idea 's too horrible, too awful — I — "

There was a step on the stairs, a rapping at the door. They drew back.

"Miss Reid!"

Her look met his, half scared, yet with a swift depth of light.

"Come in."

Mrs. Parrott stumped a foot into the room. Her small glassy eyes were turned from one to the other.

"I don't like to make no complaints, Miss Reid, and nobody 's further than me from wishing to interfere with anyone, let alone one of my lodgers. But," her observation of Geoffrey became tinged with a more definite hint of suspicion, "there 's a time for everything, and it seems to me — of course I *may* be wrong, and appearances" — she glowered at Athene — "is often deceptive, *as* we all know. All the same," she bit acidly on the point, "I can't have gentlemen brought in at this time of night, and it 's my duty to say so. My lodgings has always been respectable and always will be."

Athene gasped queerly.

"But, Mrs. Parrott," she came close to Geoffrey and slipped her arm through his, "it's my husband, Mrs. Parrott."

She felt him hold her arm close.

Mrs. Parrott visibly inflated and deflated. "Husband?" she said. "And what sort of a husband, I should like to know?" She was fierce with a sense of being made light of. "*Husband?*" Her glance at Athene implied that she'd always, only too rightly, guessed.

Athene slipped her hand more closely into Geoffrey's, and he heard her give a helpless, delighted chuckle.

"He's most respectable. He's a—bus driver," she said.

Mrs. Parrott turned about and departed, slamming the door. They heard her clumping down the stairs.

"You see, Geoff, I shall be turned out." And she slipped into his arms and began to laugh, until her laughter caught him in its enchantment, until he could only laugh with her, and feel their laughter shudder to a dizzying golden edge of tears.

EPILOGUE

EPILOGUE

THEY were together in the library at Yoxalls — Athene, Bobs, Patricia.

Outside the windows the October dusk lay over the distance of trees and hedges and fields like frosty sapphire smoke.

The flames of the log fire lit their features, and touched their eyes to a jeweled blackness, and flickered hunched shadows of their heads and shoulders high on the ceiling.

Athene stared at the transparency of her fingers against the blaze.

"They ought to be back soon." Her face, between the wings of her hair, had a secret, elusive sweetness.

Bobs curled herself into another position on her cushions.

"They'll be latish, I expect. They're shooting right the other side of Sezindean this afternoon, Jeremy said, and Clifford's joining them from there."

"I wish Geoff could get away every week-end like this. It does him such lots of good, being out in the fresh air."

"I suppose he's very busy?" Patricia glanced at her across the hearth.

"Yes. It's this book on currency he's doing. He gets right down to it, and then he hates to be disturbed, and he doesn't have much time except evenings and week-ends. Last week-end he got so much done it took me half the week to type it. His writing's terrible." Her smile held a vague tenderness.

Bobs said, "You ought to make him do exercises. I do them every morning, to set Jeremy an example. If men don't have enough exercise, they always feel bloated and depressed."

Patricia received the dictum with amusement; her look

dwelt affectionately on her sister's serious brow, on the childish head, burnished yellow between the dusk and the firelight.

"You give that as a counsel for all young wives? The husband's liver is the barometer of marital happiness?"

"According to that," Athene said, "Veronique and Clifford ought to feel sure of bliss. They never stop exercising themselves in some way or other."

Her lightness of tone seemed obscurely to challenge Bobs, who remarked: "They're rather a useless couple really." She found herself, in regard to Veronique, affected by a disapproval, a faint jealousy, which she only acknowledged to herself as surprise that Veronique should be perfectly content to do nothing.

"I don't know," said Patricia, — she envisaged them pleasantly, fair and dark, boisterous and quiescent, both with perfect health and adequate, untroubled intelligence, — "I think they're rather excellent. And as far as being useless is concerned, they'll probably produce lovely children, and have plenty of money to bring them up on."

Bobs hesitated. She wanted to be just. And the idea of a domesticated Veronique was mollifying. It seemed to humanize Veronique out of that half-enviable, half-despicable sphere of merely wearing clothes and taking taxis.

"On the other hand," she reflected aloud, her reservation deriving rather from an old loyalty than from any surviving conviction, "there are other ways — for women, I mean — of helping the world, besides marrying. Only," she added, with one of her glints of humor, "of course marriage can be such a pleasant way, because you can feel you're doing what you like and what you ought to do all in one! Marriage is like eating your cake and having it — and giving it away."

Athene said: "There aren't so many other ways you're

needed in, anyway. Unless one's like you, Patricia, with a real talent, a real gift, so that there's more in your independence than just a slavery to earning your living."

Patricia didn't look up. Her features had a curious immobility. She sat clasping her knees, without answering. When she spoke, her beautiful, husky tones were dulled to bitterness.

"Who wants independence really — I mean if you're a woman — more than anything else? Which of us really, *really* wants it, if we could have the other thing — responsibilities, affections, a life primarily of the emotions and affections? When you've got independence, even when you care for your work, even when you've achieved independence at its best — even then," her shoulders, her broad white hands, moved in the firelight with a just perceptible eloquence, "what have you got then?"

Her question seemed to echo among the dancing shadows of the room; to echo and die out.

Athene and Bobs were silent.

Patricia looked at them, at their burnished hair, their young, quiet faces, and her consciousness of detachment emphasized for her what they, at least, had got. Athene waiting for Geoffrey to come in. Bobs waiting for Jeremy. Upstairs, Mother, inevitably seeing that Father's fire was lit, that his dry clothes were laid out. She saw them in possession of something they'd come to unconsciously, strangely fulfilled, fortuitously happy, in a relation which they'd both, with their notions of usefulness or freedom, mistrusted or taken as anyway incidental to their purpose in life. She saw their tended, conscious "purposes" shriveled from a lack of natural vitality; their essential life growing from a deeper, more common soil.

"Of course," Bobs spoke from the depths of her reflections, "this business of women having careers is like

women smoking used to be; heaps of them used to smoke because it was considered odd, and now only women who really like it do it; and nobody notices which they prefer."

Outside, the dusk deepened, the windows framing a blue, dim tapestry of trees.

"On the other hand," Bobs reverted, "there are heaps of marriages which must be worse than the grimmest independence."

Patricia leaned forward to pile on another log; there was a long, soft hissing, a burst of sparks. She said:—

"There are always at least three sides to every question. I suppose the pride and curse of our generation is that we try to see them all."

Athene spoke suddenly:—

"There's no harm in seeing them all, if you can see them in the right perspective. I believe—"

They were interrupted by the sound of heavy treads, of voices in the hall. Sir Charles's deep gruffle, Mary's mild exclamation, Jeremy's cheerful "Yes, we are later than we expected."

Mary's "All better go and change your boots at once."

Bobs sprang up. Athene rose and followed her. The library door banged after them.

Patricia sat alone, clasping her knees and staring into the glowing caves of the fire.

She remained so for a long time.

And when Achilles lumbered up from his corner and padded toward her through the shadows and laid his great paw on her arm, she still didn't move.

Geoffrey was in their room.

At her entry he turned eagerly, as though he'd been half expecting, yet not quite counting upon her. He threw down his coat across a chair.

His embrace gave her an indefinable distillation of his

hours in the open air — a scent of frost, a savor of deep, wet fields. He breathed exhilaration; and as he still held her, looking into her face, it seemed to her that his whole being had absorbed the lovely vitality of the day, transmuting it to this mood.

"Darling!"

She smiled, her glance hovering over his features, noting the red-brown color under his skin, the minute spangles of water on his lashes and eyebrows. Their renewed meeting touched them with a sharp, breathless sense of their mutual significance.

"You had a good day?"

"Splendid."

She stood watching him as he sat down in the chintz-covered armchair and bent to unlace his boots.

"Clifford came and excelled himself, and was consequently in great form. He told me at lunch time that he and Veronique are going to get married at Christmas."

"Did she come?"

"Yes. Shot, too, extraordinarily well." He dragged off a boot, and flakes of mud spattered the carpet. "Sir Philip came too." Geoffrey began to unlace his left boot, and then paused to look up at his wife. "He said something very true about you."

"About me?" Recollections, fragments of already forgotten sensations, broke through the tranquillity that lapped her about.

"He said you had 'a certain magnificence of soul!'"

She colored under his gaze.

"I should say he had n't had much opportunity of judging me, except," she half smiled, "as a stenographer."

He did n't reply, but bent down again to pull off his second boot. She went over to the cupboard and fetched his slippers.

"You ought to change your stockings too, Geoff."

"Absurd darling." He took her hand as she sat on the arm of his chair. "And how did you spend the day?"

She considered; she met his gaze with a mock solemnity.

"After you'd gone, I helped your mother arrange flowers, and we talked about — infants' vests. Then I wrote letters, and congratulated Mother on getting richer again, and sent for those tickets for Thursday night. Then I went for a walk with Bobs and Achilles as far as Caldecott Hollow, and he got himself in such a muddy terrible mess that we spent all the afternoon, after I'd had my rest, trying to get him clean. And the second he got out of his bath he ran into your mother's room and jumped all over the bed, and rolled up the counterpane, and Mother was really sore with Bobs about it," — Athene couldn't help laughing, — "and they had a long argument, and Bobs said she was married and had a son, and Mother said that was n't any reason for a sheep dog ruining her counterpane, and in the end Bobs almost cried, and Patricia had to arbitrate."

"And then?" He was watching the play of her expression, the lights and shadows in her eyes.

"Then we had tea, and that seemed to put things right. And then Bobs and Patricia and I sat and talked."

"Yes. We saw you through the window as we came across the drive, looking like the three witches in Macbeth crouching over the caldron. And what," he added, "were the spells and incantations? You looked most solemnly, not to say sinisterly absorbed."

"I suppose we were doing what Clifford calls 'yattering' about Life."

He laughed. "Cliff has a healthy distaste for the theoretical." He broke off. "Tell me what you were talking about, darling."

She slipped her arm round his neck. "Something you — we — spoke about ever so long ago."

"What was that?"

"One's — all of our responsibility to the future — what one really *could* do." Her thoughts were submerged in their silence, to rise again in her question: "What would you teach a child," she hesitated and bent for a second to kiss his forehead, "ours, for instance, was important?" Again she hesitated, and then, before he could answer, went on slowly, as if each word marked a stage in the simplification of her thoughts: —

"A generation like ours has come to have so few absolute standards and so few prejudices, and we're all, as Patricia says, so terribly careful to see all round every question, that I believe our danger will be that we may n't teach our children enough how to focus; I mean, we'll find ourselves depriving them of a properly adjusted vision, and letting them grow up to see all sorts of moral and mental questions the same size."

He assented. "It's quite true. Our parents were so perfectly sure about right and wrong, in great detail, that we probably don't realize how much our own right judgments are n't instincts at all, but simply what we were taught as children. It's true; we've got to try to give ours some sort of bias — and belief, even if it is n't religious or conventional; 'focus,' as you call it."

"Then, darling, what would you teach them?" she reverted. "After all," she interpolated, half to herself, "it's they, our children, who are going to see beyond the horizons."

His reply seemed to be struck off from some unshaped, glowing substance of his spirit; to be flung out with a brilliant yet fortuitous strength: —

"Love. Charity. Is n't that enough? Does n't that

positively cover all conduct? The sensibility to other people that's involved in — in 'charity'?"

"It sounds very like Christianity."

She met the abruptness of his look.

"Perhaps," he said, "it will be — for the first time."

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